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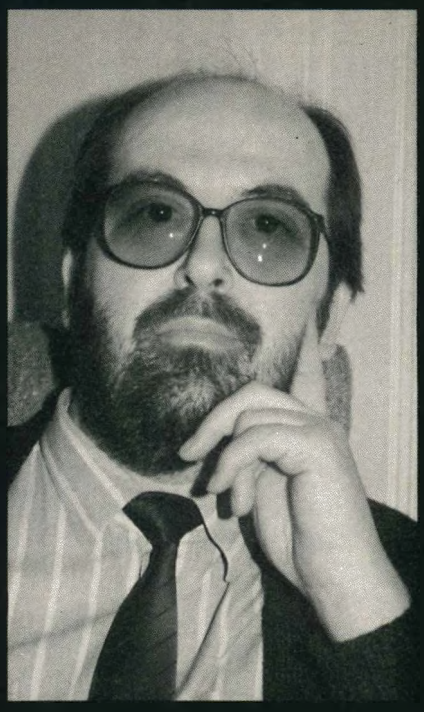
DEADITORIAL



Horror, real horror, lies not on the printed page or the silver screen, but in the real world. And, even more disturbingly, you can't see it when it's a virus and it's got all of us in its sights. Dave Reeder shares his fears.

There's a strange feeling about sitting down here to write an introduction to this issue or, on a wider perspective, to the world of horror. We could chat a while about the contributors, but then you could just turn straight to them; we could open up the discussion a bit, but that's kind of what Last Writes is developing into; we could simply talk about horror, but that always gives me a problem.

Not because I don't have a view on it. If the truth be known, I can give you views on horror until sometime next century — that's not boasting, that's just because I'm a professional editor. No, the problem I have is one that I've touched on before — how we keep being outflanked by nature.

In other words? In other words, the last editorial like this I wrote suggested that war in the Middle East might be more horrific than any novel or film; the one I'm writing now is being composed on World Aids Day. And that's really scary.

You see, it's all very well for us to enjoy the written or visual version of nature red in tooth and claw, to hug ourselves in ecstasy as we watch the chest-buster do its business in ALIEN, to cheer the shark on in JAWS, to be on the side of the world against the humans. After all, they're only pretend and the frisson of the dramatic moment is all.

But just translate that into real terms. Think about a film or a short story that centred on a virus passed from human to human, that might (years later) destroy the host from within by leaving it unable to defend itself against any attack. Didn't we cheer when the Martians were defeated by the common cold in WAR OF THE WORLDS? How come we're not on the side of viruses any more? And why doesn't this real life David Cronenburg situation enthrall us?

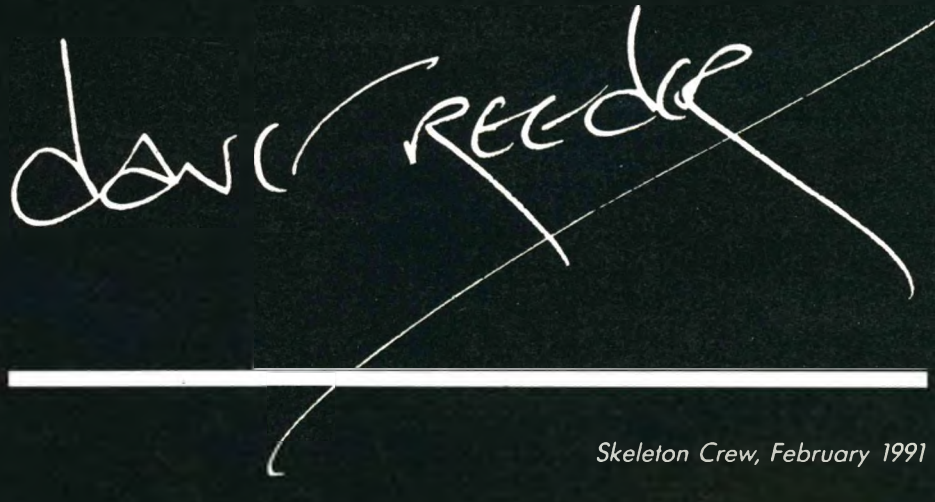
Because it doesn't. If we stop to think about it, then horror, real horror suddenly isn't much fun any more. It's bowel-gripingly frightening. And any of us could suddenly become the hero or heroine of this particular tale. Here's a horror that attacks men and women, adults and children, straights and gays, anyone — and anywhere. There is no escape. Any of us could already be living on borrowed time — remember, we don't have to have had penetrative sex, or injected drugs, or lived a homosexual lifestyle. We might just have needed a blood transfusion, for instance.

It's scary and, suddenly, I don't like being scared any more.

Yet I'm lucky — I suspect most of you are too. I don't know anyone who's died yet, though there are famous figures that I mourn. How long can that be true though? Across the world, across the cultures, across the networks of people, the virus spreads. And, sooner or later, we'll see the first victims in this world of ours — the first horror author, or artist, or actor.

So now is perhaps the time to sort out our responses to that. If, as we keep on saying, the horror genre is valuable because it enables us to stand up to and overcome our fears, then why is it all so irrelevant in the face of Aids?

In other words, unless we're very careful then it's not going to be fun anymore. For any of us.



"In other words, unless we're very careful then it's not going to be fun anymore. For any of us."

HARD-CORE-HORROR

It's perhaps the forensic honesty qualifying the complex tapestry of love, epiphany, and final disillusionment that most potently disturbs. It's lightyears away from the kitsch allegory of Spiegelman's "Maus". Like Bergman's similarly harrowing "Cries and Whispers", Britton's close and unbearable scrutiny elevates the agony of Horror's passive participation in the Holocaust into a work of tremendous power. In "Hard-Core-Horror" there is an exacting cultural reclamation of theme and material previously considered intractable to creative expression.

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"Hard-Core-Horror"; quite simply, there really aren't any precedents.

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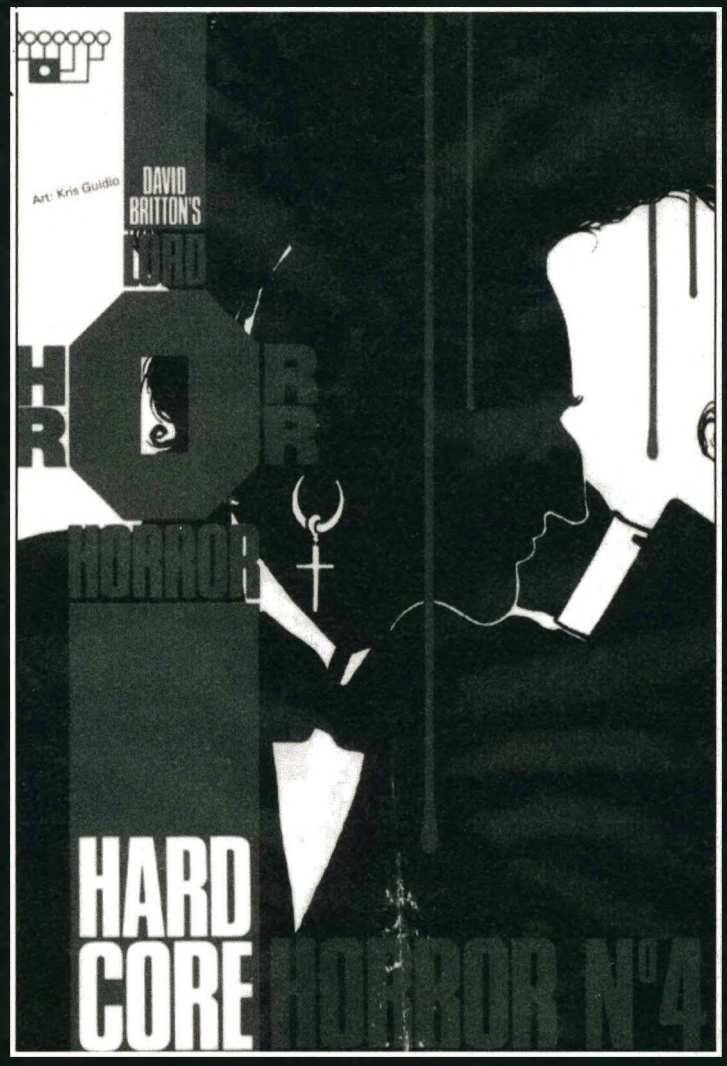
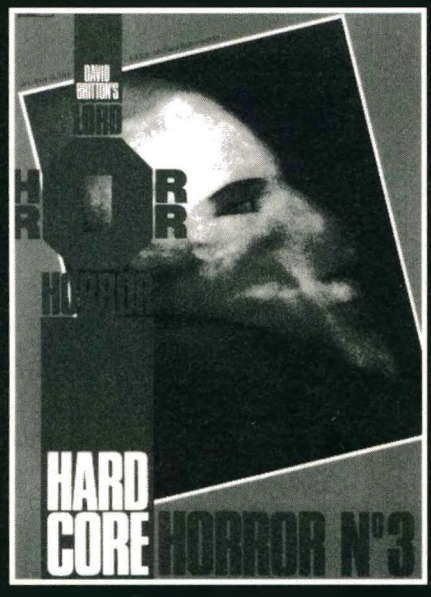
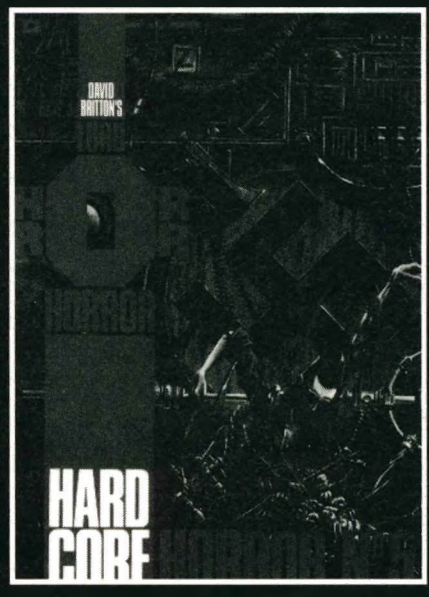
Colin de Suinn
SPEAKEASY







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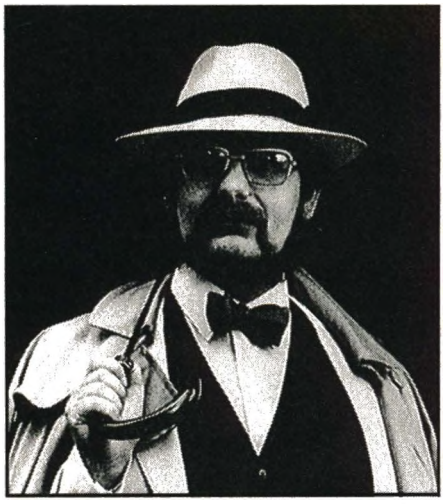


THE LUGGAGE IN THE CRYPT

You *can* take it with you. Well, so the Ancient Egyptians believed. 'It' of course was everything. Clothes, food, jewellery, furniture and if you were a member of the royal family: thrones, chariots, slaves. It was assumed that you needed in death, what you needed in life. What then did you choose? Which food, which favourite chariot etc? What items mean so much to you in this world, you'd just have to have them in the next? Nicholas Vince poses the questions to Kim Newman.

NV: The Egyptians had a very definite view of the Afterlife, but what is your own view?

KN: I am a lifetime agnostic, I come from a family of agnostics (I am a third generation agnostic) so therefore I can honestly say: I do not know.

I would like the entire world to be run like this — I think it would be a better place if people thought: this is all there was, rather than killing people and moaning a lot for some nebulous and impossible to determine post death experience. But, I'm not going go around and inflict that belief on lots and lots of other people.

NV: So, you're saying that if we believed that this was it, we'd *have* to make a better job of it.

KN: That's right. I'm not ruling out the possibility of an Afterlife. I think it would perhaps be better if we didn't bother about it, since there is no way we can materially know or effect it. Unless it means going to see FLATLINERS again, which is also something I'm just not willing to do.

NV: Now, as it's you, I think we should start with what films you'd take with you.

KN: I recently worked out my top ten films — well it comes to eleven but I'm including a cartoon which only runs seven minutes. So, they are: TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT, Howard Hawks film with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, screenplay by William Faulkner, adapted from Ernest Hemingway's novel and made in 1944. That's my all-time favourite movie.

NV: Why that one particularly?

KN: Well, it's got absolutely everything I think movies ought to have, from a theoretical and an entertainment point of view. It has nice songs and Humphrey Bogart. It has Hoagy Carmichael playing the piano. It has Lauren Bacall singing. It has lots of good jokes, inspiring stuff about the war, Walter Brennan saying: "Was you ever stung by a dead bee?", great Warner Brothers character acting and production values, Black and White photography and all that kind of stuff.

Coming next; A CANTERBURY TALE, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1944. That has Eric Portman and Dennis Price. A magical film about the potential of the British countryside and British mythology in the World War two era. Still a much underrated movie. I agonised over which Michael Powell film I would take and this was the one that in the end came up, but I think there are plenty of other really good candidates.

And we have THE SEARCHERS, (1956) John Wayne, [directed by] John Ford. Simply the greatest Western ever made. It's a film I can watch over and over again as it has endless resonances. Particularly of course the scene at the end when the door closes on John Wayne, which I think is one of the key moments in, not only in the American cinema, but in World Culture. I regard that as on a par with Captain Ahab [Gregory Peck in MOBY DICK 1956] saying: "From Hell's heart I stab at thee," as a vision of what is very bizarre about the whole notion of heroism.

Then I switch into personal favourites. I mean the other three are also personal favourites, but also films which I regard as great. I won't make any particular claims for a clutch of horror movies: this being a particular enthusiasm of mine. I would pick; LET'S SCARE JESSICA TO DEATH, 1971, a very obscure movie I happen to like. DAUGHTERS OF DARKNESS, Harry Kumel's lesbian vampire film, with Dolphine Seyrig which is I think a masterpiece and

very stylish and certainly worth watching over and over again. THE ABOMINABLE DR PHIBES, 1971, because I wanted something that summed up the fun, trashy aspect of the cinema that I still like. I think it's got lots of good and terrible jokes. It has nice art direction, great music, Vincent Price, lots of people dying, stuff like that. And to round the Horror Movie section off; Roger Corman's A BUCKET OF BLOOD. Which, although a very makeshift movie, is actually quite profound about the whole nature of artistic expression. It's also very funny about Beatniks and Dick Miller is wonderful in it.

Then we move on to films which I suppose were really affecting me at the time I was just getting professionally into the cinema. I would pick Francis Ford Coppola's APOCALYPSE NOW, which I think is a magnificently huge and flawed masterpiece. And again a film I can watch over and over again, preferably on a huge screen with proper stereo, so you're going to have to arrange this in my crypt. Certainly 70mm, though I would quite like the credit sequence that's only available on 35mm. But to go along with that I would pick Martin Scorsese's THE KING OF COMEDY, which is a very understated film from a genius, but also a film with which I can profoundly identify with. I started in this business identifying with Robert De Nero and have now got to the point where I identify with Jerry Lewis in that movie, which is perhaps one of the more bleak and frightening things about the whole business. Still, I think it's one of the best films of the eighties. As I'm not going to be allowed to take an animate object, i.e. women, I would have to take BABY, IT'S YOU; for Rosanna Arquette. I like the film anyway, but that would be the main reason for taking it. And the cartoon I would pick, is any of the cartoons featuring the character SCREWBALL SQUIRREL, invented by Tex Avery in the 1940s. One of the least successful cartoon series of all time, but I think the funniest, also because it is massively cruel.

Those are the films I think I could sit down and watch over and over again — there are many films which I really like, but I wouldn't want to sit down and watch once a week for the rest of Eternity. I suspect, after Eternity even the films I like would become excruciating.

"I'm not ruling out the possibility of an Afterlife. I think it would perhaps be better if we didn't bother about it, since there is no way we can materially know or effect it. Unless it means going to see FLATLINERS again, which is also something I'm just not willing to do."

NV: If there was a fire in the crypt and you only had the chance to rise of your slab and grab say, two or three; would it be the first three you mentioned?

KN: I'd probably go for a reel of BABY, IT'S YOU as well.

NV: I can understand that. Now, what music would you take with you?

KN: You're going to love this — again, this was a lot of 'subbing' down. We, start with MR SANDMAN by The Chordettes. Then we have POISON IVY by The Coasters. WOOLY BULLY by Sam The Sham and The Pharaohs. A MOUSE LIVED IN A WINDMILL IN OLD AMSTERDAM by Ronnie Hilton and I WISH I WAS A SPACEMAN (Theme from FIREBALL X.L.5.) by Don Spencer.

NV: I appreciate particularly the last two of those. Why MR SANDMAN?

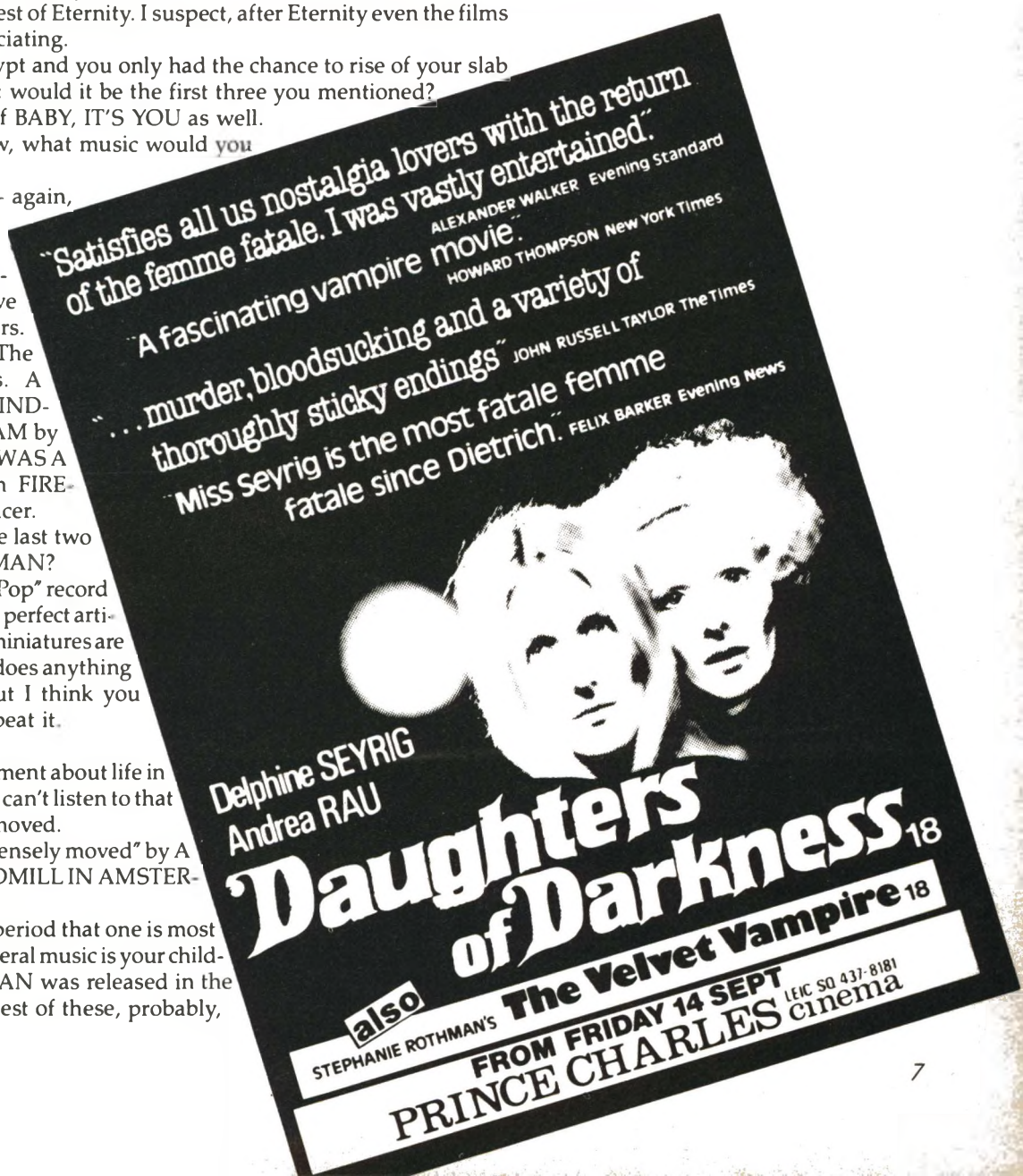
KN: I think it is simply the best "Pop" record of all time. Its absolutely the perfect artifact, in the sense that some miniatures are perfect. I don't think that it does anything particularly marvellous, but I think you would by hard pushed to beat it.

NV: And WOOLY BULLY?

KN: I think it's just a major statement about life in the mid twentieth century. I can't listen to that without feeling intensely moved.

NV: I presume you don't get "intensely moved" by A MOUSE LIVED IN A WINDMILL IN AMSTERDAM.

KN: Well, I always feel that the period that one is most actively interested in ephemeral music is your childhood. I think MR SANDMAN was released in the year I was born and the latest of these, probably,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BULLY. So, they are all from a particular spectrum of years in the Sixties. A MOUSE LIVED IN A WINDMILL is also, I think, very funny and still works. I WISH I WAS A SPACEMAN is the first piece of music I think I can remember. It's also one of the songs I used to do when I was in cabaret. So, I'd like something to remind me of those miserable years.

NV: I didn't know you did cabaret.

KN: That's what I did before I was a writer.

NV: What did you do in cabaret?

KN: When I left University, I got involved in a small arts collective in the West Country and we used to do theatre and cabaret and singing and all that kind of stuff and after a while I decided not to do it and go and be a writer because then you have only to rely on yourself.

NV: You got fed up with the hassle of trying to get five people in the same place at the same time?

KN: More or less. I just got fed up of being in the back of a transit van at four in the morning, with four tons of equipment and a bunch of really depressed people.

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NV: That sounds sensible. Moving on, which books would you take?

KN: I've narrowed it down to two out of literally four tons. Again, the problem I had with this, is there are plenty of books which I really like, but I'm not sure I would lie to re-read them over and over again. In particular I would find it difficult re-reading novels. I was tempted to put MOBY DICK down, which is a book I do really like, and can be re-read infinitely, but that struck me as being a bit posy, because that is not the thing I would immediately drag down off the shelf, if I had a free weekend and I was allowed to re-read anything. So, I've picked DIARY OF A NOBODY by George and Weedon Grossmith and THE LONG GOODBYE, by Raymond Chandler.

DIARY OF A NOBODY because it's funny and I think it can be re-read in sections — it was originally published as a series of articles in PUNCH. I find its World View quite appealing still. I like absurdist comedy. I'm always very interested in technical, boring, things like curt narrative voices. I think this does a very interesting thing, by creating the unintentionally absurd narrative voice

who towards the end of the book you still cannot help but come round to believe is a genuine hero, even though everything he believes is patently ridiculous. I would rank DIARY OF A NOBODY with James Hogg's THE MEMOIRS AND CONFESSIONS OF A JUSTIFIED SINNER as one of the cleverest untrustworthy narrator novels.

The other choice, THE LONG GOODBYE: I think it's Chandler's best novel. It's not his best mystery, but it's his best novel. Chandler is for me and, I suspect, for a lot of other people who probably wouldn't admit it, certainly the most intellectual writer of the century. Certainly as a writer he is the person I envy the most, partly for the superficial tricks, the funny metaphors and the evocation of the Los Angeles of the time. Also for the way he managed to say serious things within a restricted generic framework. THE LONG GOODBYE is the one that has the most seriousness bursting out from in between the seams of the mystery, which is why the mystery kind of gets lost. It's a very interesting novel about writers; it is basically about a writer who is having a terrible time and becoming an alcoholic, which is presumably Chandler being partly autobiographical. But also, I think it's the one where the character of Philip Marlowe emerges in the most interesting and bleak terms. I like the film as well, but the book would take priority.

I limited myself to two books — and you can have no idea how much agony and pain that caused me. Then, I'm not taking any comics so I guess that balances the number of films.

NV: Indeed. What about objets d'art, paintings, sculpture?

KN: Well, I thought of taking something really big, and self indulgent; like a Sphinx, but in the end I decided to pick a painting that actually goes really well with my book choice: NIGHTHAWKS by Edward Hopper. It's one of those things you can stare at forever.

NV: It's one of those things you can make up biographies for the characters in the painting.

KN: I did think of the great works of Art, like Da Vinci's LAST SUPPER, but you know them all ready, I don't need to have them. NIGHTHAWKS is something I'm not *that* familiar with. The same goes for music and books, things that you know so well don don't need to re-read them.

NV: Would you take a smaller statue or anything else?

KN: I would rather have 'nice, but useful objects' as opposed to 'nice, but use*less* objects'. I would probably, being brought up in a home of stoneware pottery, I would probably take a decent coffee set. Or A TEA POT, one of my father's tea pots.

NV: An item of furniture.

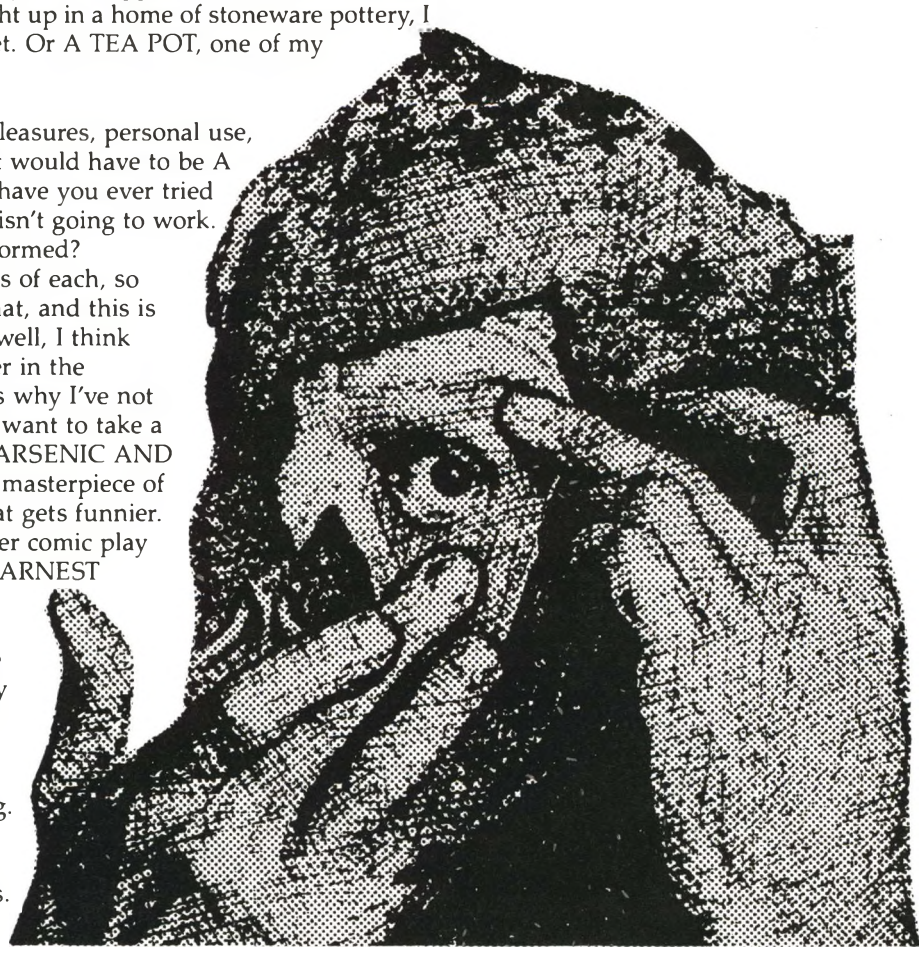
KN: Again I considered items of aesthetic pleasures, personal use, comfort and all that kind of stuff and it would have to be A LARGE FOUR POSTER BED, because have you ever tried sleeping on a chair or a table — it just isn't going to work.

NV: Plays or musicals you'd like to see performed?

KN: Well again, I had to pick representatives of each, so again there was much agony. I think that, and this is from having worked in the Theatre as well, I think that Comedy or Farce work much better in the Theatre than in the Cinema — which is why I've not taken that many Funny Films. I would want to take a Funny Play, and I would want to take ARSENIC AND OLD LACE by Joseph Kesselrig. It is a masterpiece of construction and one of those plays that gets funnier. Going out on a limb, I think it is a better comic play than THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST [Oscar Wilde]. It won't last as long because it's so specific about World War Two America. But, simply because for where the laughs come and the way the characters are forced against each other it is much funnier — it also has people die in it. There's a kind of quaint cruelty to it that I find appealing.

Then, I had to pick one Musical, which again was very difficult for me, because I'm very interested in Musicals. I considered and rejected: WEST SIDE

"I started in this business identifying with Robert De Nero and have now got to the point where I identify with Jerry Lewis."



"As I'm not going to be allowed to take an animate object, i.e. women, I would have to take BABY, IT'S YOU; for Rosanna Arquette."

STORY [Sondheim and Bernstein] and SWEENEY TODD [Sondheim], both of which I do admire wholly. In the end I plumped for GUYS AND DOLLS [Frederick Loesser from the stories of Damon Runyan]. One of the problems I have with WEST SIDE STORY, although I think it's a brilliant score, is that I think the Book is makeshift. SWEENEY TODD is a complete masterpiece but strikes me as being more an Opera than a Musical. GUYS AND DOLLS is a *Musical*. I mean, it's witty all the way through, I don't think there is one bad song in it and there is one really bad song in WEST SIDE STORY: 'Make of Our Hearts, One Heart'.

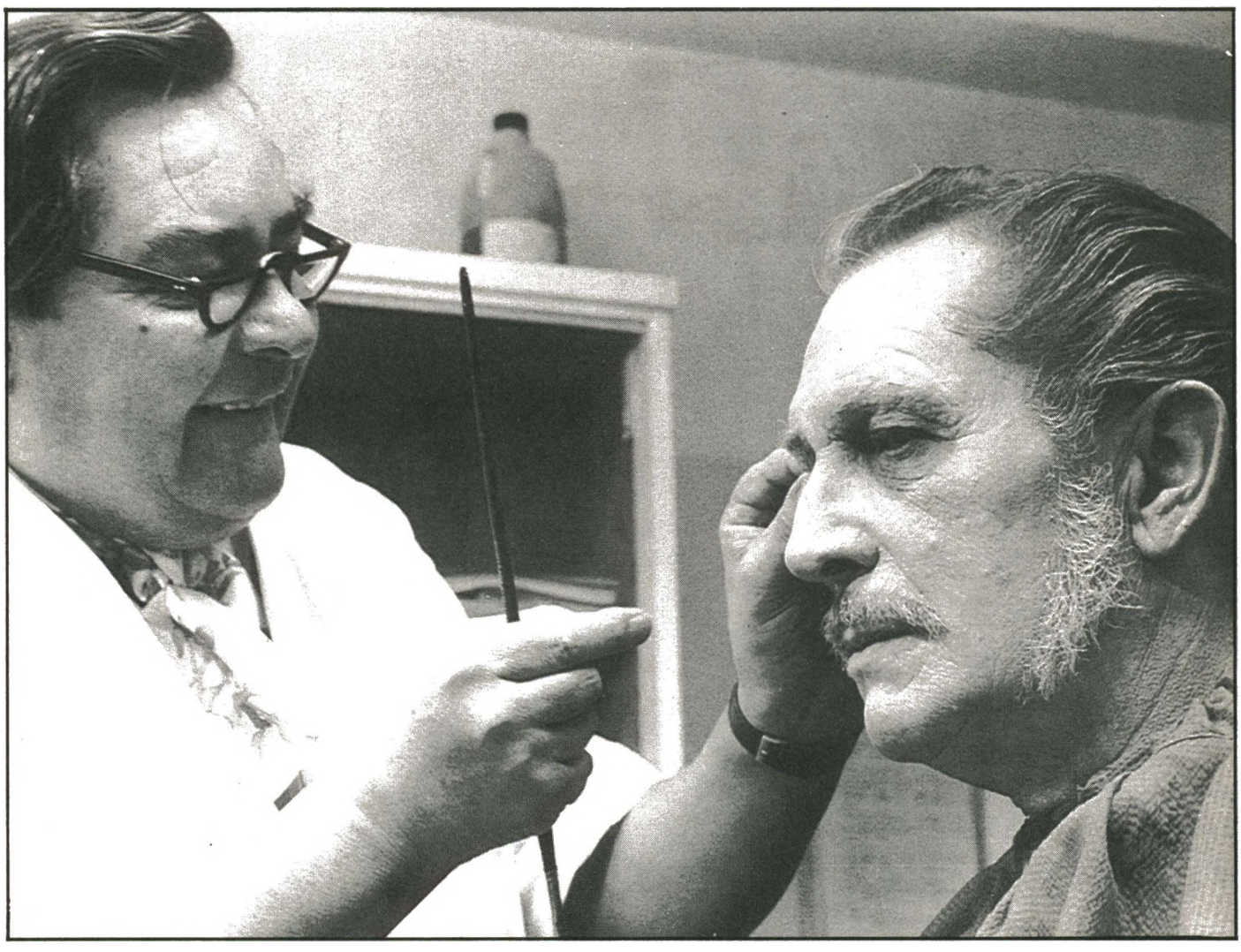
NV: I believe that's not the one that Bernstein chose — his least favourite was 'I Feel Pretty'.

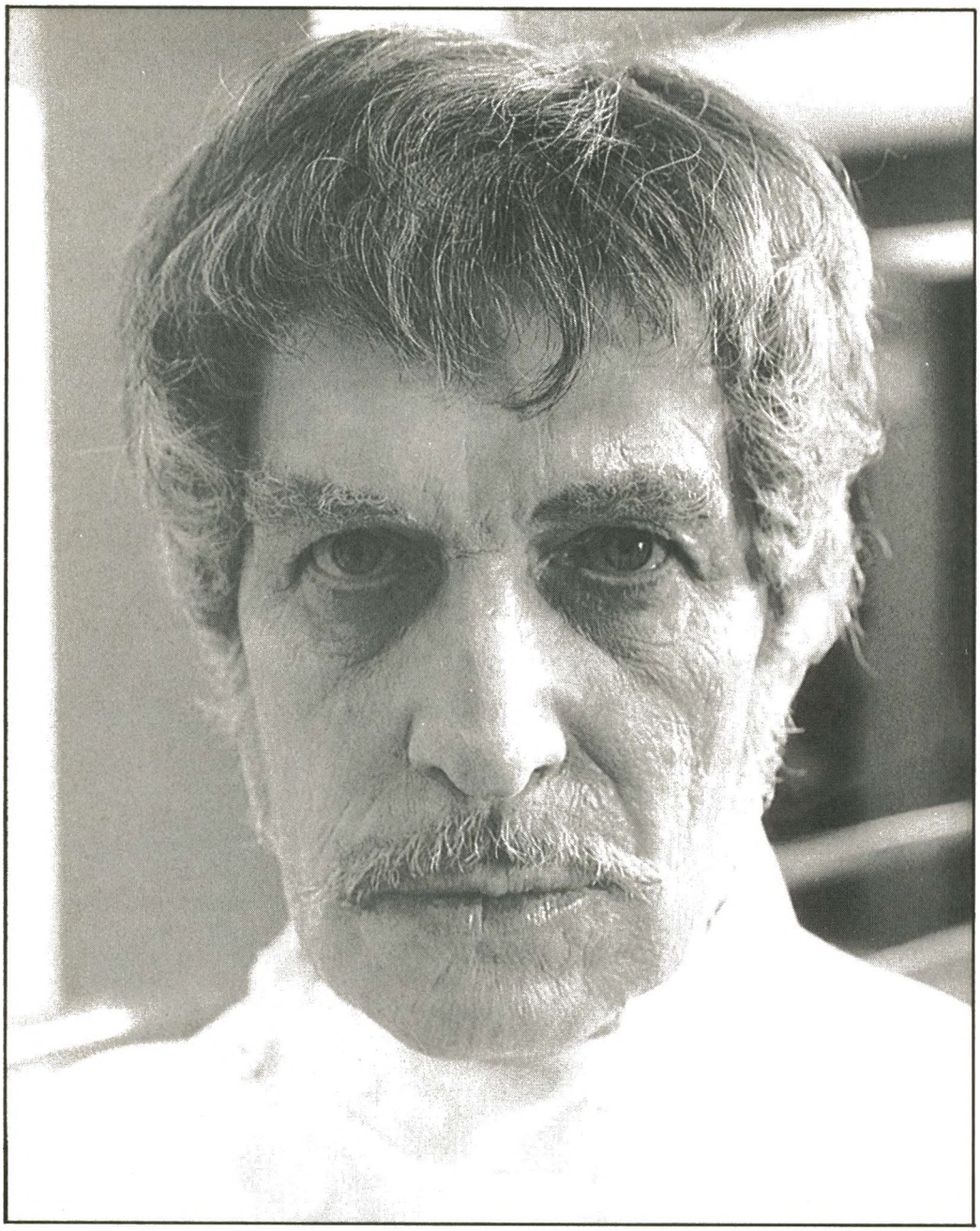
KN: I think that 'Make of Our Hearts' is worse than that. It's the fake sentiment in it, it's the 'We Need a Heart' moment. I think the sentimental moments in GUYS AND DOLLS actually work, rather well, because they are played with a nice irony.

Then I would have to go back for the Classical Play. So, this basically means: "Picking Your Shakespeare". This to me was hard, firstly because you have to decide whether you want a Comedy or a Tragedy or a Historical play. I ruled out the Histories, as I don't tend to like those very much. In the end, since I had ARSENIC AND OLD LACE, I wouldn't go for a Comedy. If I went for a Comedy it would probably be TWELFTH NIGHT, which is perhaps the most miserable of the Comedies. It is also the first thing I acted in on a stage, so it has a sentimental value.

It came down to the Tragedies. MACBETH and HAMLET were out, for the familiarity rule. I got it down to LEAR and OTHELLO. I think OTHELLO is probably one of Shakespear's most perfect plays, as it has less wrong with it than the other plays. I think LEAR is a greater play, so I picked that, also OTHELLO is too often mangled in the production. I think that it is a play that it is very difficult for performers these days to understand and LEAR, I think, encourages greater acting and greater performances.

NV: Do you have a favourite production of LEAR or a particular favourite actor?





KN: I've not seen it done really well. I thought Olivier wasn't very good as Lear. I don't know who I would pick . . . Ralph Richardson, probably, who I didn't see and who I believe didn't have much of a success in it. I didn't much care for Paul Scofield's Lear, partly because I only saw the film and I don't think that Peter Brook's a very interesting film maker. Perhaps John Carradine . . .

NV: That would be interesting.

KN: He never made it. It was his one big ambition and he didn't manage it, but I think it would have been fine.

NV: Costumes you'd like to be buried in?

KN: The clothes I'm wearing. I'm sure everyone says that.

NV: I have had different answers.

NV: So, do you have a particular favourite cravat, white shirt, waistcoat . . .

KN: Not really. I don't think you should misrepresent yourself in death by tarting yourself up something rotten. I'm sure plenty of your other interviewees . . .

NV: Actually only two have really gone to town.

KN: Well, how is it going affect you — unless you want to upset your mother at the funeral and I don't think that a very noble or honest motive.

NV: What objects of personal value would you take?

KN: My files. I do keep lots of things in my files, including bills and correspondence and stuff like that. I think that would be the most useful thing to take with you as all you have in the crypt is your memories, so you might as well have some aide memoires.

"I was tempted to put MOBY DICK down, which is a book I do really like, and can be re-read infinitely, but that struck me as being a bit posy, because that is not the thing I would immediately drag down off the shelf, if I had a free weekend and I was allowed to re-read anything."

"I don't think you should misrepresent yourself in death by tarting yourself up something rotten."

NV: What about favourite food?

KN: Hard that one. I actually couldn't think of anything, so I'll take Margaret Thatcher.

NV: Do you intend some necrophiliac cannibalism?

KN: No, I just thought that if you're going, you ought to do something for the world and I thought taking Margaret Thatcher's head, in particular, would notably improve the lot of the living.

NV: I like that idea a lot. Right, what is the one thing, given the chance you'd go back and do again?

KN: I would have insisted on a different arrangement on the Club Whoopee EP track YOU'RE SORT OF O.K. in 1982.

NV: As I am very ignorant, could you explain that to me?

KN: I thought it was a really good song, but we killed it in the arrangement and therefore it wasn't terribly successful. At that time, and indeed now, I thought I didn't know enough about music and let the man who did the arrangement go along with it.

"'I haven't been that bad, really.' I don't know . . . it would be presumptious to justify my life by my art, so I won't. I think I would point to the millions of people I have enriched by simply passing this way. (Laughs)"

What we should have done was annoyed more people and done it properly. In fact, what we should have done is: not have the rest of the group on and have done it with solo piano and voice — as opposed to the hideous over orchestration we did on it.

NV: This is your group I take it, and so you were lead vocalist in those days?

KN: Yes, and I wrote the lyrics. In fact one of the things I would have insisted on was: 'not being on this record'. I would have insisted the girl did it as she had a much better voice than I did.

NV: Can people still rush out and buy this record?

KN: Certainly not! I would hope it's been deleted and disappeared! Even I don't have a copy.

NV: They were probably made into those nice flower pots you can make out of old records.

KN: I think we did actually make lots of those. I remember spraying them gold, I remember throwing them off bridges. That answer was actually fairly trivial. I did look back and decide that no matter how miserable I'd been at various points in my life, I wouldn't change it because I'm quite pleased with where I ended up and I think if you take any of the building bricks out; the whole thing falls down.

NV: If we put you up against a Celestial Court what would be your apologia?

KN: This is the "How you justify your entire life?" in front of God and Mary Whitehouse etc.

NV: Yes.

KN: Well, I'd do what almost everyone else would do. I would lie.

NV: In what way would you lie? What would you claim?

KN: Anything that couldn't be checked. I would attribute anonymous acts of beneficence to myself throughout my entire life.

NV: And if they said, sorry we have the Truth in front of us, written in letters of gold, what would you say?

KN: 'I haven't been that bad, *really.*" I don't know . . . It would be presumptious to justify my life by my art, so I won't. I think I would point to the millions of people I have enriched by simply passing this way. (Laughs)

NV; That's cool — you enriched my life by recommending THE LITTLE MERMAID [Walt Disney].

KN: Well, that's a start. I *would* point to my many anonymous acts of kindness that I won't talk about. Y'know, I've helped people get work and all that kind of stuff. I've never killed a child, no matter how much I've been tempted. Generally I've tried to be one of the Good Guys — I'd never kick a priest.

I've been reasonably honest, even at my own expense. Looking at the various things I do for a living: as a critic, I've never actually deliberately lied about what I've felt about something in order to curry favour or to seem trendy. Let's face it: I'm one of the very few people in this business who can say that. Yeah, that may very well be why I have no friends.

"Y'know, I've helped people get work and all that kind of stuff. I've never killed a child, no matter how much I've been tempted."

THE ROOTS OF HORROR

The next time our favourite genre is criticised for excessive gore, take Andy Sawyer's advice — remind the critics about the classics. Heh, heh, heh!

To hear people talk, you'd think that horror fiction had only just been discovered and was a new thing to be stamped out at all costs. While agreeing that there's an awful lot of bad horror about, I can't see that it's a particular sign of the Decadence Of Our Times, especially given the fact that readers and theatre audiences four hundred years ago were facing scenes which would send many of today's hardened splatterpunk fans reaching for the sickbag.

Take Shakespeare's TITUS ANDRONICUS, for instance: Act 3 Scene 4 shows us the hero's daughter after having been raped, tongue torn out and hands cut off, while the two lads who have done it laugh and joke. Titus gets his revenge in an appropriately gruesome manner by baking them in a pie and serving them up to their mother the Queen of the Goths, followed by what the stage directions modestly describe as "a great tumult" in which various major characters are stabbed to death.

It's perhaps for this reason that we see so few performances of the play today. On the other hand, KING LEAR, generally acknowledged as one of the man's greatest works, contains a particularly gruelling scene in which The Earl of Gloucester's eyes are put out on stage. ("Out, vile jelly!") Shaun Hutson, eat your heart out.

The supernatural and violence are constant features of MACBETH. The prophesying witches are well known, as is the profanity ("What bloody man is that?" (Duncan, Act One Scene Three)). Not only does the Scottish Play constantly twang the twin strings of blood and murder on virtually every page, it contains spells and conjuration to such an extent that an entire theatrical superstition has grown up around the play. It has even been suggested that real occultism has somehow got in, by design or accident, and has jinxed anyone who attempts to produce the play. Certainly, many actors believe that MACBETH is a particularly unlucky play to perform — don't say its title backstage!

Even some of the apparent humour has gory background. Guaranteed to raise a laugh when I did my 'A' levels was the stage direction in A WINTER'S TALE, "Exit: pursued by a bear." Yet this reminds us that not so far away was the bear ring where as entertainment — entertainment! — bears and dogs were whipped on to tear each other to pieces. Possibly one of the wretched beasts was hired for the occasion to give the audience a real thrill . . . and they could always go and watch it being mutilated afterwards. Tasteless? You ain't heard nothing yet.

Shakespeare wasn't the only dramatist involved with horror. You remember the scene in HAMLET when the Prince picks up a skull in a graveyard: "Alas, poor Yorick . . ." That one. Just about every playwright that was anybody wrote a scene with a skull in it. Dekker put one in THE HONEST WHORE so that Hippolito could contemplate death every Monday. The author of THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY (probably Tourner or Middleton) went one better with an elaborate plot in which the wicked Duke was deceived into thinking that a skillfully made dummy is a new bit of stuff with a lech for the aristocracy who happens to be a bit bashful — not to mention thin as her 'head' is in fact the skull of the 'Revenger's girlfriend, poisoned by the Duke. "Go on — kiss her," urges Vindice. The randy Duke does so and is himself poisoned in mid-slobber by some noxious substance with which the skull has been coated. Another Duke, in THE DUCHESS OF MALFI by John Webster — one of the greatest writers of psychological horror ever — is spotted hanging around a churchyard around midnight "with the leg of a man upon his shoulder, and he howled fearfully; said he was a wolf, only the difference was a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside; his on the inside".

An even more eerie story — but this time a true one, so we're told — is associated with Marlowe's DR FAUSTUS. The actual play is spooky enough. Faustus conjures up a demon and sells his soul for unlimited power. He then uses it to play silly tricks on the Pope and leer at the spirit of Helen of Troy when most of us would be getting down to some serious evil, but the play contains some fine scenes of terror, especially towards the end where Faustus is waiting to be carried off to eternal torment. But what allegedly happened at Exeter during a performance of the play is even spookier.

While the actor playing Faustus was chanting his magical summonings, the rest of the cast bounded about the stage acting as devils. Suddenly each one of them became

"Take Shakespeare's TITUS ANDRONICUS, for instance: Act 3 Scene 4 shows us the hero's daughter after having been raped, tongue torn out and hands cut off, while the two lads who have done it laugh and joke."

"'Go on — kiss her,' urges Vindice. The randy Duke does so and is himself poisoned in mid-slobber by some noxious substance with which the skull has been coated."

convinced that "there was one devil too many among them" and the play ended in confusion with a terrified audience streaming out of doors.

The leader of the players, Edward Alleyn, was so convinced that something had answered Faustus's call that he vowed to perform a major work of charity. He eventually founded Dulwich College and thus became indirectly responsible for Raymond Chandler and P.G. Wodehouse.

Horror fiction as opposed to drama was still in its infancy around the turn of the 16th/17th centuries, but then so was prose fiction of any sort. There wasn't a great deal of anything apart from interminable mock-medieval romances involving knights on quests and the occasional joke-book of mind-numbing tedium.

Thomas Nashe, however, has some claim to being one of the fathers of the horror-story. He explores graphic nastiness in some detail in THE UNFORTUNATE TRAVELLER, in which its hero narrowly escapes being used as an example in an anatomy lesson, and ghoulishy and enthusiastically relates some of the more interesting executions he has known, one involving iron stakes, acid washes and fireworks tied to particularly tender parts of the body and another in which the starring roles were taken by one Cutwolfe, a criminal, and an executioner with a hammer and a pot of venomous worms. Some people think there might have been something wrong with Nashe.

He turned to supernatural horror in his non-fictional THE TERRORS OF THE NIGHT which is perhaps one of the earliest analyses of what makes our flesh creep and why. We fear the night, he wrote, because it is programed within us to do so, because it is the natural habitat of the devil. In fact, we are surrounded with evil spirits. "There is not a room in any man's house but is pestered and close-packed with a camp-royal of devils." And at night we sleep and dream. Or rather, have nightmares.

Despite the talk of devils and demons, Nashe sneered at those who thought that dreams were messages from the supernatural world. But his "rational" explanation carries enough fear within it: dreams are the mind replaying events of the day or responding to stimuli while the body is asleep, but all Nashe's examples are taken from nightmare:

"If in the dead of night there by any rumbling, knocking or disturbance near us, we straight dream of wars or thunder. If a dog howl, we suppose we are transported into hell, where we hear the complaint of damned ghosts . . . I knew one that was cramped, and he dreamed that he was torn in pieces with wild horses . . ."

Nashe included in THE TERRORS OF THE NIGHT one of the earliest tales of terror — rather than an apparently factual account of an apparition — in English literature. He describes the "waking visions" of a "gentleman of good worship and credit" who had fallen sick. He was haunted by a crew of devils which first appeared as (symbolic) nets and hooks, then as swaggering sailors, then as "lovely youths" bringing treasures, tempting him with gold and pearls, and then as "an inveigling troop of naked virgins". Even this did not allure him and on being told that he was too ill to do anything anyway, they departed. Some "sober-attired matrons" who were apparently Good Spirits came to pray for him, although this did not stop "a slender naked foot offering to steal betwixt the sheets in to him".

Eventually, the poor man died, as Nashe says, "raving".

All this of course is true, protests the author, as God's my witness. But he would say that anyway. I've not changed anything from my sources, honest, claims Nashe: well, I've only "embroidered" it to make it fun to read. I think we've heard that before.

"With all these dark visions following us after nightfall, what are we to do? Nashe offers the following remedy, which I can only endorse: "First and foremost, drink moderately, and dice and drab not away your money prodigally and then foreswear yourselves to borrow more."

Nashe cites similar instances of the supernatural: a nobleman haunted by a couple of hogs who mysteriously vanished from a locked barn; men haunted by the spirits of their dead wives, and instances of weasels, rats and hares following their victims wherever they went. With all these dark visions following us after nightfall, what are we to do? Nashe offers the following remedy, which I can only endorse: "First and foremost, drink moderately, and dice and drab not away your money prodigally and then foreswear yourselves to borrow more."

OK, I'll start — tomorrow. Nashe was the kind of writer who today would be writing obsessively frightening stories and telling us how good for the soul it all is. But he's indubitably effective, and when it comes to creating atmosphere or grotesque images could teach most writers of today a thing or two. And yet not too many readers outside of universities have heard of him. Perhaps it's all to do with an image of Elizabethan writers composing songs which go "hey nonny no" all the time, while actors prance about the stage being fairies out of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (now that's an eerie tale, when you think about it). However, there was more to it than that anyway. It's interesting to see how the audience was going for the same guts, gore 'n' ghouls as find receptive readers/viewers today. But perhaps we'd better let Shakespeare have the last word:

"O horror! horror! horror! Tongue nor heart
Cannot conceive nor name thee!" (MACBETH Act 2 Scene 3).

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AN ELEMENT OF CORRUPTION

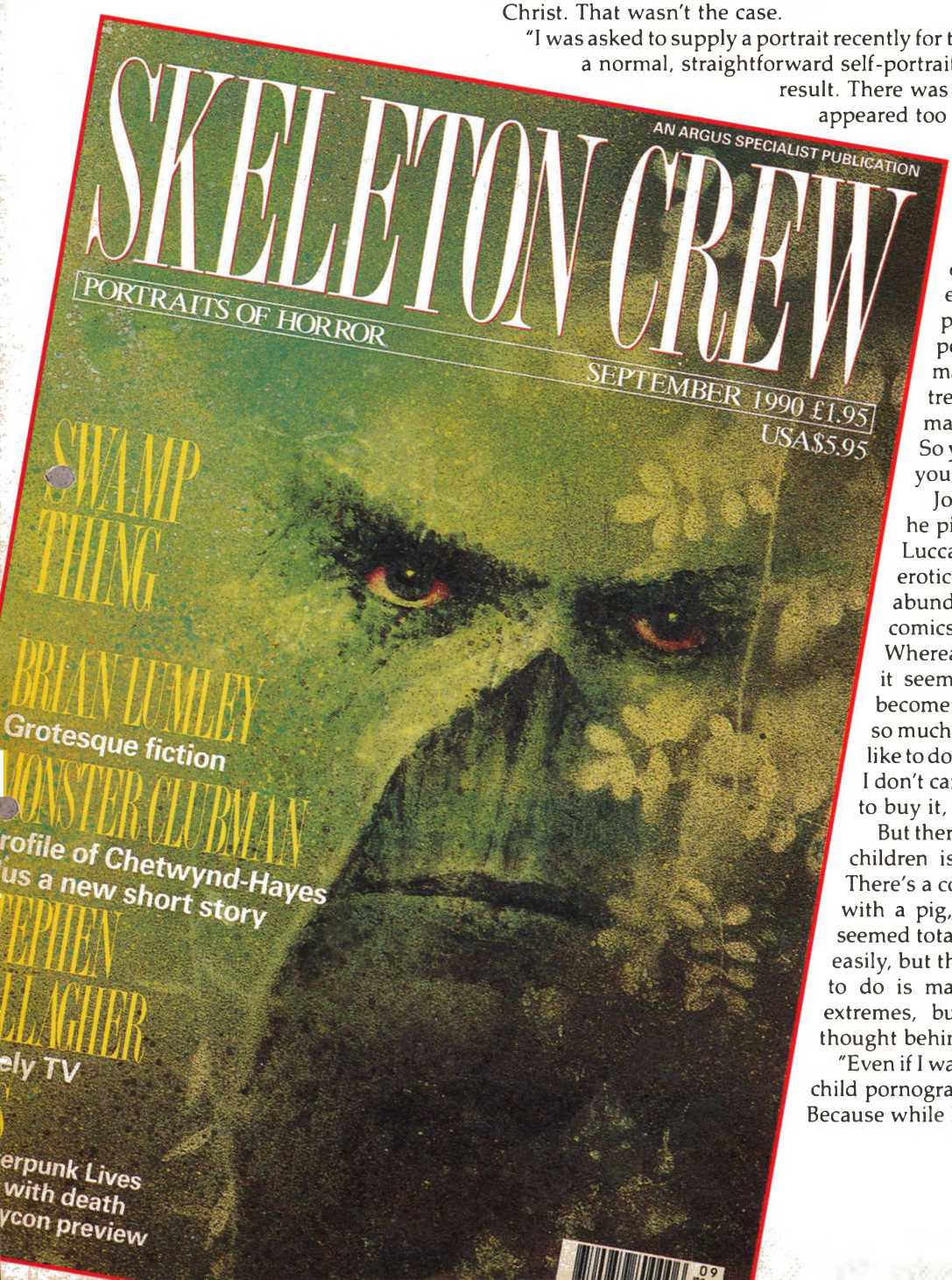
Amongst British horror artists, John Bolton has been regarded as the master craftsman for a decade or more. Yet, as he explains to Stan Nicholls, he's always dissatisfied.

"I've just crucified Clive Barker," confesses John Bolton. "I have his head and arms nailed to a crucifix." The portrait is for the cover of a forthcoming issue of PANDEMONIUM magazine, featuring a Bolton portfolio based on three Barker stories — RAWHEAD REX, DREAD and NEW MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE. "What's always impressed me about Clive is that he's such a charming, generous man to talk to," Bolton says, "but he can still come up with this rather visceral, gross imagery.

"I've been doing a number of portraits lately, and I have to try to get inside the character to find out more about the person, and convey that in the image. With Clive, it's a fully-rendered oil painting, but I had to corrupt it in some way. Which is really what Clive is about; here is a nice guy, but obviously for him to do what he's doing he has to be somewhat twisted. I wanted to capture that in the painting.

"There are probably going to be a lot of people offended by it, because of what the cross represents, but that seems to suggest the cross only had one purpose; to crucify Christ. That wasn't the case.

"I was asked to supply a portrait recently for the JOHN BOLTON PORTFOLIO; just a normal, straightforward self-portrait. But I was dissatisfied with the end result. There was no problem with the likeness, it just appeared too clean-cut. So, on impulse, I attacked the piece with a scalpel. With a few strokes of the blade I managed to convey an element of corruption."

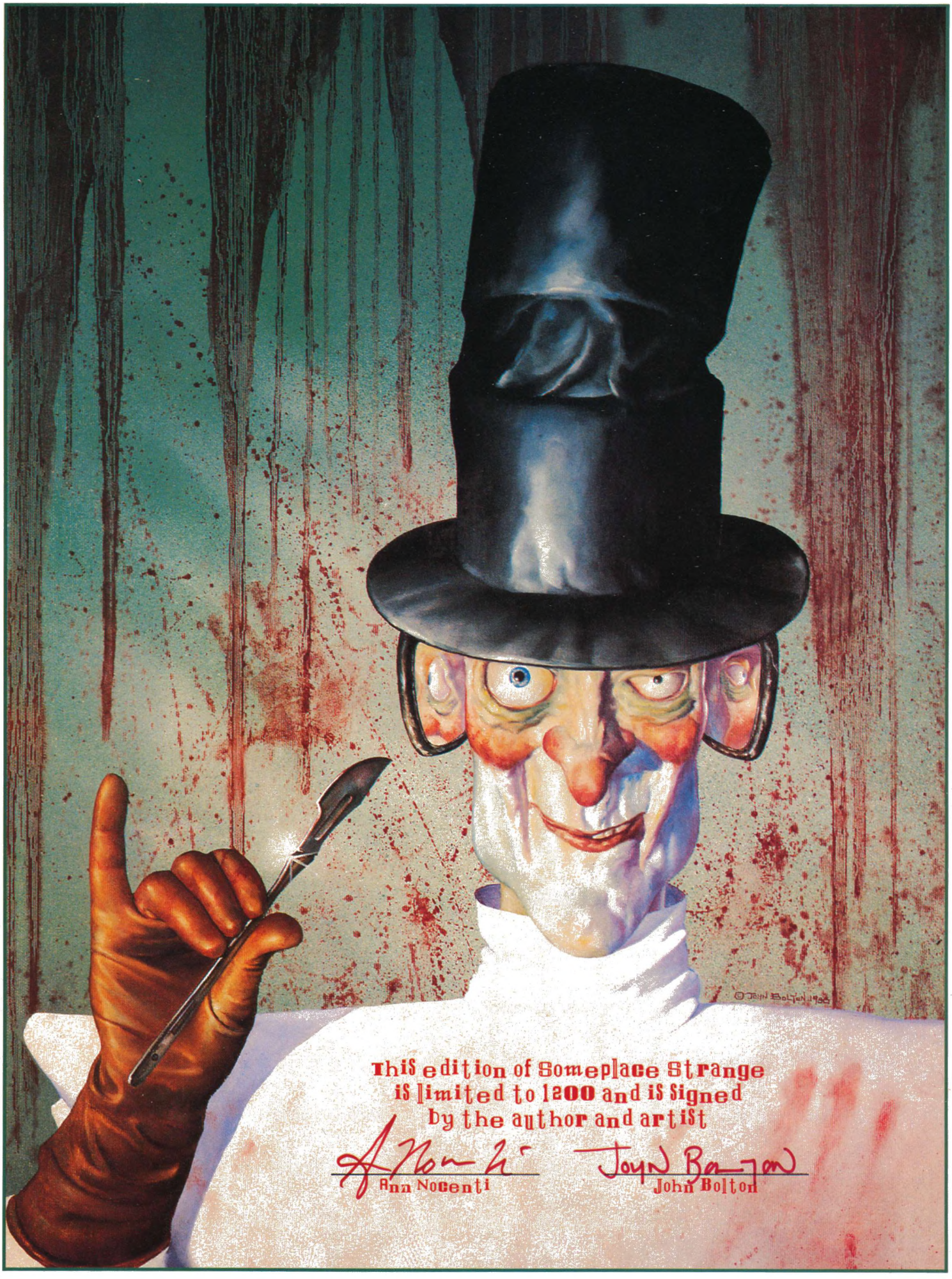


This distortion of imagery is similar to what a political cartoonist or caricaturist might do? "Yes, you're emphasising and exaggerating the points you think are really what that person is about. In this respect, Steadman and Scarfe are both people I admire tremendously, especially what Scarfe managed to do with his political figures. So yes, you're taking a characteristic from your subject and elaborating on it."

John has just returned from Italy, where he picked up an award at a convention in Lucca, and became aware of the quantity of eroticism on sale there. "When there's an abundance of something, as there is of erotic comics in Italy, you become used to it. Whereas over here, if you see an erotic comic it seems out of place, and in a sense you become more judgmental about it. There was so much of it over there I suddenly thought I'd like to do some. You see, I'm such a genial chap, I don't care what's in print. If somebody wants to buy it, terrific."

But there are *some* limits. "Anything to do with children is certainly out, and so is bestiality. There's a comic I've seen with this girl making it with a pig, and I couldn't quite accept that. It seemed totally irrelevant to me. I'm not offended easily, but this seemed unnecessary. What I want to do is maximise the effect. I want to go to extremes, but I would prefer there was some thought behind my work.

"Even if I was asked to contribute to a book *against* child pornography I would still feel uncomfortable. Because while I'm trying to put that sort of message


This edition of Someplace Strange
is limited to 1200 and is signed
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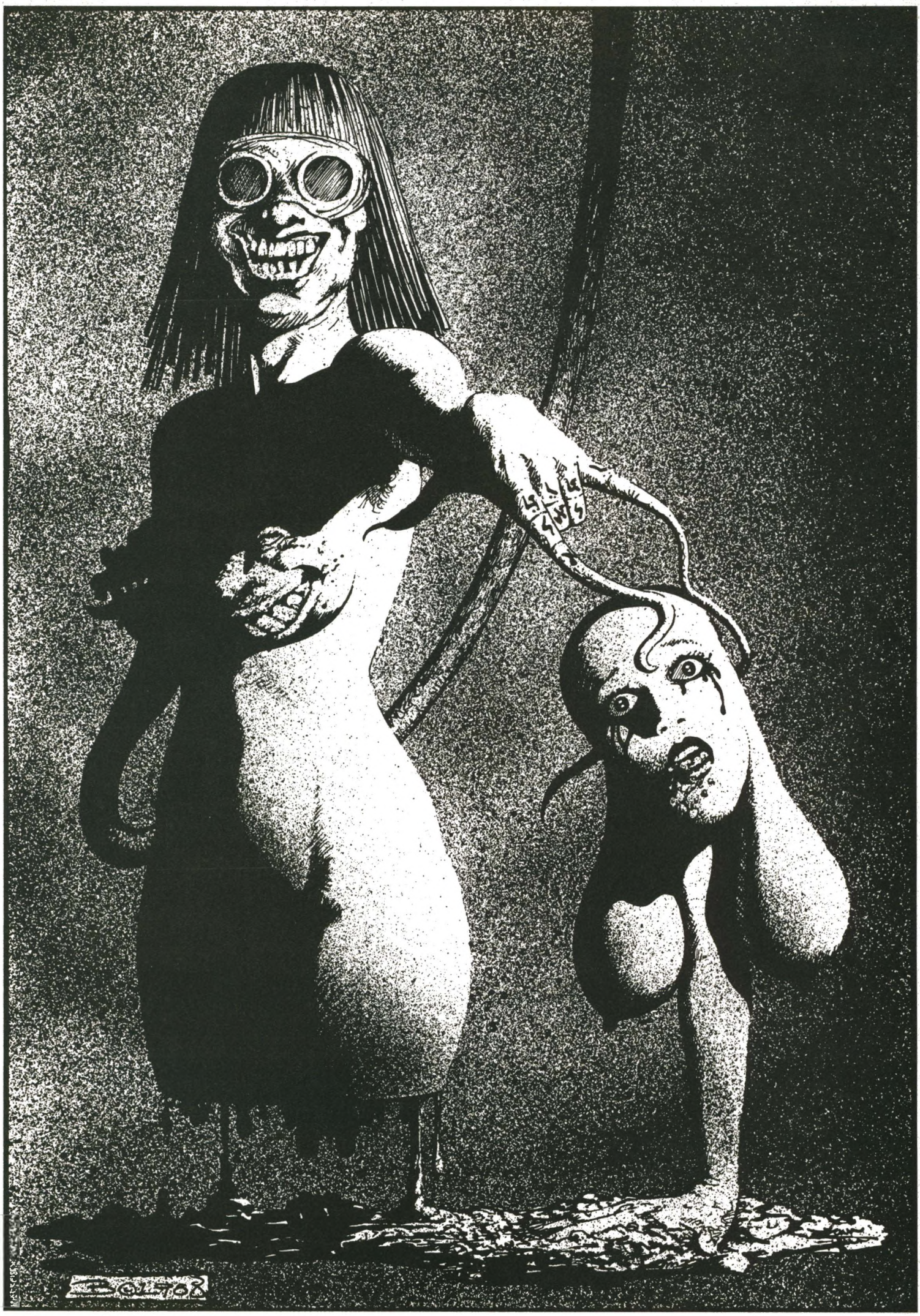
Ann Nocenti
John Bolton

"'I was asked to supply a portrait recently for the JOHN BOLTON PORTFOLIO; just a normal, straightforward self-portrait. But I was dissatisfied with the end result. There was no problem with the likeness, it just appeared too clean-cut. So, on impulse, I attacked the piece with a scalpel. With a few strokes of the blade I managed to convey an element of corruption.'"

across it then becomes somebody else's pornography. It's better to avoid it altogether. Apart from that, I'll do anything — like sticking a nail through a penis; that wouldn't bother me. I wouldn't consider it pornographic.

"For instance, I did a strip for TAPPING THE VEIN, with two gay guys running through a corn field. But I would like to have gone further than that, because it was relevant; I wanted swinging genitalia, in order to heighten the effect. But I knew I couldn't. So it's just at the edge of the frame, that was as far as I got. I'd reached the boundary of what was acceptable.

"The reaction to TAPPING THE VEIN was curious. On the one hand it was really good; I've made more gay friends since they've seen that than I ever had before. On the other hand there was a problem with the colour separators who were handling the book. As I understand it, the people on the shop floor really liked it, and there was some lively discussion going on



between them. The owner of the plant, whose office was nearby, heard this and came out. He took one look at the material and refused to handle it.

"He was a born-again Christian, and presumably that had some bearing on his decision. Not that I have anything against born-again Christians. But it was a hypocritical decision, because, while turning down something I considered positive and loving, he seemed quite happy to reproduce other books containing images of rape and sexual violence. So I can't just blame him for being a born-again Christian, I have to blame him for being a hypocrite."

His illustration for NEW MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE consists of a huge, open cut-throat razor framing the face of an ape, with his female victim lying across the bottom. "You'll know if you've read the story that there's a strong sexual aspect," he says. "It's quite an erotic piece, and I wanted to get that across, so I used a woman as a victim, whereas perhaps I could have as easily used a man. There are three victims in the story, two women and one man, so it was up to me what I decided to illustrate. And there's the phallic symbolism of the open cut-throat, which is deliberate, of course. But I wouldn't want somebody who hadn't read the story to see the illustration as exploitation of women.

"What you have to understand is that with me this isn't something my life revolves around. I enjoy drawing women. I'm working with a multitude of different subjects, some of which include women, some of which don't. It was only when I did the TAPPING THE VEIN cover that I got an insight into this. Originally, that was going to be Marilyn Monroe, or a Marilyn Monroe type, with a hand coming out of her eye socket holding the eyeball. When I was discussing this with the publisher, she said, 'Why does this have to be a woman?' So I made it a man, because it didn't interfere with the impact. Man or woman, it didn't matter. I really think it's simply a matter of preference. I just happen to prefer painting women to men.

"The question is, do some people have to be protected? I don't know. You see, I can look at a film like EVIL DEAD and think it's hilarious. Somebody else might look at it and think, 'I must go out and try that on somebody' — whether it's murder or sexual deviation or whatever.

"I suppose there should be some form of censorship, because I don't want kids picking up certain things that are obviously not intended for them. On the other hand I don't want to stop somebody else looking at it. That's up to them, they can make the decision themselves. At the same time the idea of a comic shop being prosecuted for selling something is absurd. That's the dilemma I'm in. I don't know where to draw the line."

Is there a sense in which his work acts as a catharsis for him? "I don't feel I need to exercise anything, but I suppose there must be an element of that.

"The thing about whatever you produce is that you know there are always alternatives. Is the one you've done the right one, or was the one you were going to do better? An example of this was the SWAMP THING cover I did for SKELETON CREW. [Issue 3; Sept,1990.] I did one, but I didn't really understand the character. I'd never read the books thinking that one day I'd be painting him. There is a difference. So when I was asked to do a SWAMP THING cover I came up with a SWAMP THING painting, but it was totally wrong. I spent a week looking at this bloody painting — and it was done to

"His illustration for NEW MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE consists of a huge, open cut-throat razor framing the face of an ape, with his female victim lying across the bottom."

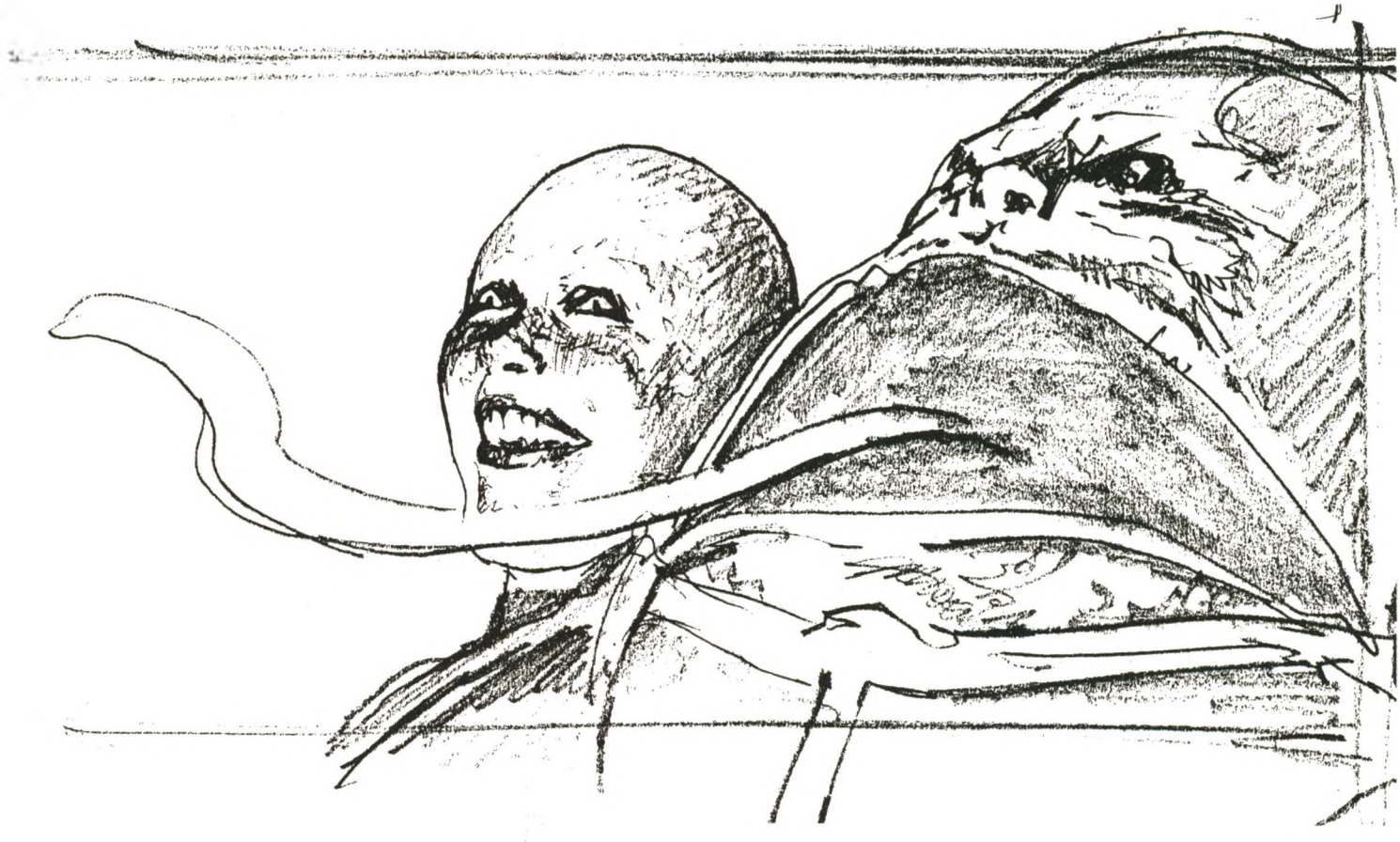
JOHN BOLTON © 1994

"'I've always been interested in horror; it's always been a love of my life, and I've tried to bend and shape my material towards that. With more and more outlets for this type of work, in a sense the market has now caught up with me.'"

an incredibly tight deadline — and I couldn't work out whether it was right or wrong. I wondered whether there was an alternative. So I painted a second version, which is far, far superior to the first one. One has a feeling if something has gelled or not."

Apart from the Barker portfolio, future projects include a collaboration with writer Christopher Fowler, author of CITY JITTERS, ROOFWORLD, BUREAU OF LOST SOULS and RUNE. "We are talking about contracts at the moment. Chris is such a nice, personable guy, despite working in an industry as tough as the movie business." As well as being a novelist, Fowler runs The Creative Partnership, the UKs largest independent film promotion and trailer-making company. Bolton himself worked as a storyboard artist on such films as DREAM DEMON and THE TALL GUY; he also drew a promotional magazine, in strip form, for THE MONSTER CLUB.

Another intriguing possibility is a partnership with film maker Sam Raimi. "I can't say that much about it at the moment because it's still in a state of flux. Certainly at some point we are going to work together. But not on a film — this is something that Sam would write and I would illustrate.



"I love Sam's work, and I enjoyed EVIL DEAD 2 immensely; it was incredibly funny. I recently saw DARKMAN. At first, I thought the character didn't have any real depth, then there was a scene that really, really worked for me. Darkman's walking down the street in the pouring rain and he spots his girlfriend. When she sees this bandaged, disfigured character, she screams and runs off. And then — it was so pathetic and poignant — as he turned to leave, he slipped off the pavement. It's not slapstick, it's not Charlie Chaplin, it was just you felt totally in sympathy with him at that point. Suddenly he was a three-dimensional character, and not a comic book character."

"And where does he see this process of corrupting or degrading his artwork leading? 'I don't know. Setting it on fire, I suppose. And taking a photograph as the whole thing goes up in smoke!'"

John Bolton sees his lifelong fascination for the bizarre continuing. "I've always been interested in horror; it's always been a love of my life, and I've tried to bend and shape my material towards that. With more and more outlets for this type of work, in a sense the market has now caught up with me."

And where does he see this process of corrupting or degrading his artwork leading? "I don't know. Setting it on fire, I suppose. And taking a photograph as the whole thing goes up in smoke!"

MORE TWIN TITANS OF TERROR

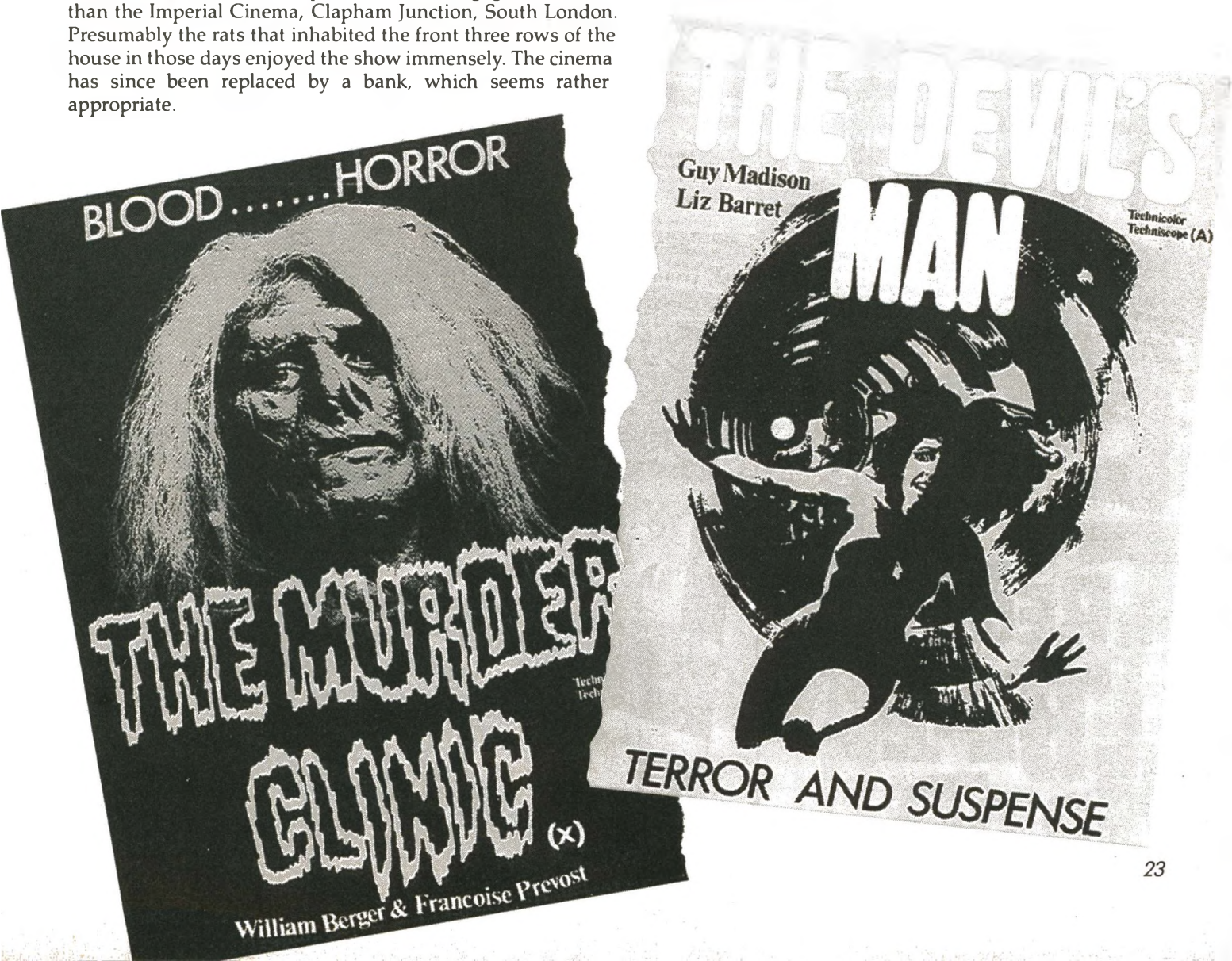
Following last issue's walk down the memory lane of horror double bills, Mike Wathen brings the story up to date. And, in the process, recalls some of the strangest pairings since King Kong and Fay Wray.

"Alone, either would shock you out of your skin. Together they become the ultimate in horror shows! THE FROZEN DEAD — Chiller of the Year — Fiends frozen dead at the height of their diabolical powers and brought back alive years later. IT — Monster of the Year. It rises out of the depths of time to reach the heights of terror. We don't dare describe it because you might be afraid to come to the theatre."

Yeah, right. Wayward English to the side, the above is a fairly typical example of 1960s horror double-bill advertising. Once exhibitors discovered that two horror films in a programme made them more money than one, the '60s became a golden age for the things. As a general rule, in Britain at least, 'respectable' productions (Hammer and the more expensive looking AIP films) were released through the major circuits, in those days Rank and ABC, and the non-respectable on the steadily shrinking independent circuits (Classic, Essoldo, etc.).

Confusion was often caused by films being released too close together, or being inappropriately coupled. In 1966 DRACULA, PRINCE OF DARKNESS/PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES and RASPUTIN, THE MAD MONK/THE REPTILE were released only weeks apart, which was fine aside from the fact the films shared two lots of sets and many cast members. Castle Dracula suddenly becoming the Winter Palace is a bit of a jolt. Released at much the same time were MONSTER OF TERROR (aka DIE, MONSTER, DIE) and the heavily cut HAUNTED PALACE — which was also fine apart from both films being set in Arkham, one apparently in the Home Counties, the other in fog- and stage-bound New England.

Among the less major releases were CASTLE OF BLOOD (aka DANZA MACABRA) together with PREHISTORIC VALLEY (aka VALLEY OF THE DRAGONS) which received their premier British engagement at no less an establishment than the Imperial Cinema, Clapham Junction, South London. Presumably the rats that inhabited the front three rows of the house in those days enjoyed the show immensely. The cinema has since been replaced by a bank, which seems rather appropriate.



R IN COLOR
BEAST OF THE YELLOW NIGHT
WOMEN in TERR
EMI
PEPPARD-
CARRADINE-
KATE JACKSON
BLAST THE SCREEN APART WITH ACTION AND THRILLS!
DAMNATION ALLEY
THUNDER AND LIGHTNING
DAMNATION ALLEY.
GEORGE PEPPARD
JAN-MICHAEL VINCENT
DOMINIQUE SANDA
PAUL WINFIELD · JACKIE EARLE HALEY
DAVID CARRADINE
KATE JACKSON
THUNDER AND LIGHTNING.
SOMETHING DEADLY IN THE WATER... MORE
BARRACUDA
AA
CREATURE WITH THE BLUE HAND
GP
WAYNE DAVID CRAWFORD · JASON EVERS
BERT FREED as PAPA JACK
An ENTERTAINMEN

MORE TWIN TITANS OF TERROR

Reissues were still a staple at the smaller cinemas in those days. FRANKENSTEIN/HOUSE OF DRACULA played together throughout the mid-60s, as did THE BODY SNATCHER/THE LEOPARD MAN among many others of similar vintage. Although not released on double bill originally, the remake of THE CABINET OF DR CALIGARI (The PSYCHO of 1962. It Shocks the Unshockables!) played many dates at the little cinemas with STAKEOUT ON DOPE STREET.

"CARNIVAL OF SOULS, another rarity (at least until recently) was doubled in the UK with something called MINI WEEKEND skirts rather than cars, at a guess . . .)"

DR!
IT"
lins
ng
Ride the Magic Carpet into an Arabian Nights wonder-world, re-created in the splendours of Magifi-mation
The Thief of Baghdad.
His greatest challenge...
IT TAKES A SUPER-HERO TO SAVE A GREAT CITY FROM A SUPER THREAT.
SPIDER-MAN STRIKES BACK
HIS AND HER HORROR!
A secret cult of lust-craved witches torturing with fire and desire!
"DAUGHTERS OF SATAN"
AND
"SUPERBEAST"
Half-man, half-monster ripping helpless victims to shreds in his mad hunger!
"DAUGHTERS OF SATAN" Directed by HOLLINGSWORTH MORSE · Produced by AUBREY SCHENCK Screenplay by JOHN C. HIGGINS
"SUPERBEAST" Directed by GEORGE SCHENCK · Produced by GEORGE SCHENCK Screenplay by GEORGE SCHENCK
R United Artists
THEATRE
LER WHALE!
Whatever the Dirty Dozen did they do it dirtier!
THE INGLORIOUS BASTARDS
AA
Starring BO SVENSON · PETER HOOTEN · FRED WILLIAMSON
JACKIE BASEHART · JAN BANNEN · COLOUR

THE HUMAN DUPLICATORS/MUTINY IN OUTER SPACE was a must-see double that was around for years, as was CASTLE OF TERROR (aka LA VERGINE DI NORIMBERGA) and HORROR (aka THE BLANCHEVILLE MONSTER), the latter a Spanish-Italian attempt at Edgar Allan Poe.

WITCHCRAFT, HOUSE OF THE DAMNED, CURSE OF THE FLY and EARTH DIES SCREAMING were all Robert L. Lippert productions made as double-bill fodder. Which film appeared with which often varied from city to city. Another film from this odd little group, the would-be horror-comedy THE HORROR OF IT ALL ended up in the company of an Anglo-French war film, WEEKEND AT DUNKIRK! Of perhaps greater interest, the obscure and supposedly quite wonderful NIGHT TIDE was released in Britain with THE CURSE AND THE COFFIN, a French adaption of John Dickson Carr's novel THE BURNING COURT. NIGHT TIDE's director, Curtis Harrington, got the double-bill treatment again with his first major picture, GAMES. It was released with Don Siegel's MADIGAN. CARNIVAL OF SOULS, another rarity (at least until recently) was doubled in the UK with something called MINI WEEKEND (skirts rather than cars, at a guess . . .).

Cult director Richard Reeves had his whole output (admittedly very small) released as halves of double bills in Britain. CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD came out with TERROR CREATURES FROM THE GRAVE, REVENGE OF THE BLOOD BEAST with a Riccardo Freda spy rip-off called THE EXTERMINATORS, THE SORCERERS with Roger Corman's re-write of 'Richard III', TOWER OF LONDON and WITCHFINDER GENERAL was lucky enough to be paired with the killer moth movie DEATH'S HEAD VAMPIRE.

At least the last mentioned got a major release on the ABC circuit which is more than the others did. Also hidden away among the 'floating' releases at the smaller cinemas was much of Mario Bava's output. REVENGE OF THE VAMPIRE, released in

"It rises out of the depths of time to reach the heights of terror. We don't dare describe it because you might be afraid to come to the theatre."

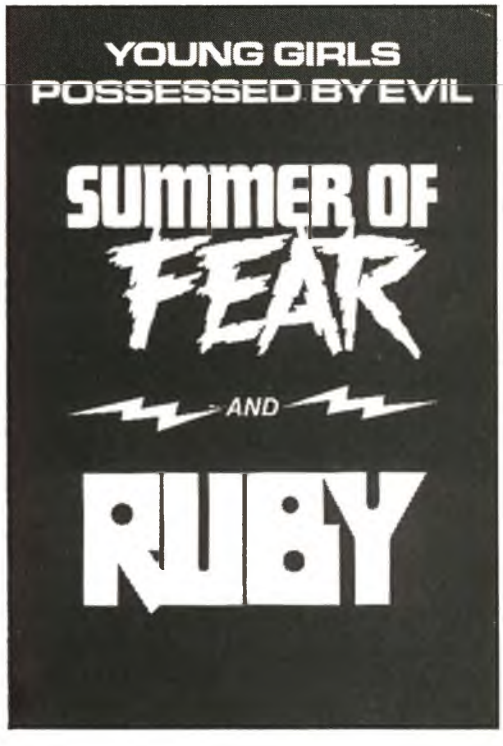
OTEL HELL
of critters to make Farmer Vincent Fritters
You might just die... laughing!
EXHIB
TWO MASTER STORY TELLERS PRESENT A CLASSIC PROGRAMME IN HORROR & ADVENTURE
THE LIVING DEAD CHANGE PLACES IN A OF TERROR
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WILL PREPARE YOU FOR WHAT YOU WILL SEE!
THE "FLESH EATERS"
The only people who will not be STERILIZED with FEAR are those among you who are already DEAD!
THIS IS HORROR
DEATH CURSE OF TARTU
Fred PINERO
Babette SHERRILL
THE MOST ASTONISHING ADVENTURE EVER FILMED!
In MONSTASCOPE

1968 turned out to be the long banned LA MASCHERA DEL DEMONIO, aka BLACK SUNDAY. One of the best horror films of its time, it was co-featured with one of the worst, STING OF DEATH, the sensitive story of a half-man, half-jellyfish. Bava's PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES was released with the supposed-satire WILD IN THE STREETS and THE EVIL EYE with COMEDY OF TERRORS.

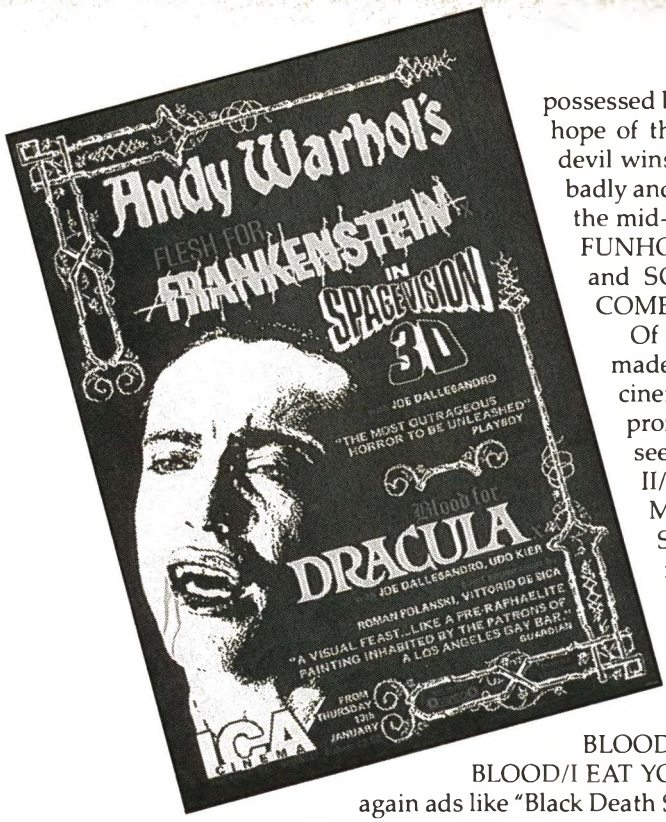
Meanwhile, back at the major circuits (well ABC, later EMI — Rank didn't seem too interested in horror in those days) all this lot were in release between the mid-60s and the early 70s: THE OBLONG BOX/THE DUNWICH HORROR, FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN/THE MUMMY'S SHROUD, SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN/HELL'S ANGELS '69, THE ABOMINABLE DR.PHIBES/INCREDIBLE TWO-HEADED TRANSPLANT, DR.PHIBES RISES AGAIN/THE WILD ANGELS (Cut but better than nothing), TWINS OF EVIL/HANDS OF THE RIPPER, SCARS OF DRACULA/HORROR OF FRANKENSTEIN, DR. JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE/ BLOOD FROM THE MUMMY'S TOMB, COUNT YORGA, VAMPIRE/CRY OF THE BANSHEE, MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE/RETURN OF COUNT YORGA and not forgetting the 'Women in Peril' programme FEAR IN THE NIGHT/STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING. And that's only some of 'em.

Rather more interesting mutations of the form could be found in such combinations as HOUSE OF DARK SHADOWS/THE TRAVELLING EXECUTIONER — the former a fairly standard vampire thriller based on the US tv show, the other a black comedy with Stacy Keach as an enterprising soul who takes his electric chair and portable generator around jails too poor to afford their own; DEATH LINE ('Mind the doors!) with NIGHT HAIR CHILD (Together! Nightmare Horror and Menacing Sex!); THE FINAL PROGRAMME (Failed attempt at filming Michael Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius) with CONFESSIONS OF A CHINESE COURTESAN; and Jesus Franco's COUNT DRACULA with Massimo Dallamano's DORIAN GRAY.

By the mid 70s THE EXORCIST proved that horror films could go out unsupported and make money, and the exhibitors were discovering that you could make even more by doing away with the support feature and showing the A film more often. There were still some interesting combinations to be found — ZOMBIE FLESH EATERS/ THE TOOLBOX MURDERS, SHIVERS/CANNIBAL GIRLS ("They do exactly what you think they do" . . .), MOTEL HELL/THE LAST EMBRACE and many EXORCIST rip-offs like THE DEVIL'S NIGHTMARE/IN THE DEVIL'S GARDEN ('Can you be



"One of the best horror films of its time, it was co-featured with one of the worst, STING OF DEATH, the sensitive story of a half-man, half-jellyfish."


Andy Warhol's
FLESH FOR FRANKENSTEIN
IN SPACEVISION 3D
JOE DALLESANDRO
"THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS HORROR TO BE UNLEASHED" PLAYBOY
DRACULA
JOE DALLESANDRO, UDO KIER
ROMAN POLANSKI, VITTORIO DE SICA
"A VISUAL FEAST...LIKE A PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTING INHABITED BY THE PATRONS OF A LOS ANGELES GAY BAR." GUARDIAN
FROM THURSDAY 13th JANUARY
ICA CINEMA

possessed by the devil? Exorcism! The one last hope of the possessed . . . but this time the devil wins!') but the double-bill was limping badly and video pretty much finished it off in the mid-80s, amidst such last gasps as THE FUNHOUSE/MY BLOODY VALENTINE and SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES/TRON.

Of course, the films were still being made, and if those smaller independent cinemas still existed in anything like the profusion they once did we would have seen programmes like BASKETCASE II/FRANKENHOOKER or I, MADMAN/THE CHURCH or MONKEY SHINES/TWO EVIL EYES or . . . but no, this kind of stuff makes one or two appearances at the various horror film festivals and then goes straight to video. We will probably never get the chance to catch up with the likes of QUEEN OF BLOOD/BLOOD BATH or I DRINK YOUR BLOOD/I EAT YOUR SKIN on the big screen, or see again ads like "Black Death Stalks the Night With a Voodoo Terror that Feeds in the Hidden Depths of Your Mind. Your Nightmares are Suddenly Alive and Shove you Screaming to the Bottomless Pit of Hell. There is no Escape."(plus) "Were They Men . . . Or Monsters . . . or both? With one viscious slash they severed the jugular vein of an entire city." (NAKED EVIL/THE GORILLA GANG).

It's all a bit mad, isn't it?

Together! Two NEW Hammer super-thrillers!
SCARS OF DRACULA
starring CHRISTOPHER LEE
with DENNIS WATERMAN · JENNY HANLEY · CHRISTOPHER MATTHEWS
HORROR OF FRANKENSTEIN
starring RALPH BATES · KATE O'MARA
VERONICA CARLSON and DENNIS PRICE

SACRIFICE

Increasingly disturbing, increasingly ubiquitous, the short horror fiction of Simon Clark disturbs and excites. This thoughtful story of elder forces confirms his promise.

They caught the fell walker on Manshead Moor. It may have been their numbers, or the fact they carried bronze swords and axes that he didn't utter so much as a sound.

The man, early thirties, tall, wearing jeans and a *Greenpeace* sweatshirt allowed them to take his rucksack. He seemed hypnotised by the dozen or so bronze swords pointed at him by these rough-looking warriors, the blades reflecting the brilliant summer sun.

Without speaking two men held his arms behind his back while a third bound the man's wrists with electric flex, the calloused hands expertly twisting and looping the flex until he was bound tight. Then they led him down a moorland path, down to a village in a secluded valley.

The houses, typical to that area of the Yorkshire Pennines, were built of stone beneath roofs of weathered tile. Nothing special. It could have been a village anywhere: A butcher's; a tiny post office with a bright red post box set in the asphalt pavement. In a gap between two houses somebody in a desperate attempt to be quaint had built a wishing well. It looked bloody awful. At the end of the main street stood a redbrick pub. That had one of those fibre glass elephants in the beer garden where kids could climb up through its belly, crawl out of its mouth and slide down a long pink tongue to the ground.

Yes. Everything normal. Everything profoundly bloody normal, thought the man. Apart from one thing. Twenty men had surrounded him on the moor — and taken him captive. For what? For the first time the man broke his stunned silence.

"What's all this then?" He sounded nervous. "Ah . . . Some kind of carnival?"

No-one spoke. As they reached the village the men pushed the blades of their swords into the broad leather belts they all wore. Apart from their belts their clothing was that of an average farm labourer.

"I know." The man forced a weak laugh. "I have to pay a ransom. That's it, isn't it? A new mini bus for the school? Church roof? Something like that, isn't it?"

Again none of the stone-faced men spoke. He looked round at them his scared eyes widening.

"That's what it is, isn't it? A fete, a carnival?" A pleading note had crept into his voice.

"With an ugly smile the woman studied his face. 'Why on earth would we do that, Mr. Wainwright?' He managed a half shrug. 'You're lunatics. Too much inbreeding. Too much pesticide sprayed too near the village. It's rotted your brains.'"

They lead him into the village and to a small cottage with a doorway so low even a small man would have to stoop to enter. A man in his fifties — the leader of the warriors? — tapped respectfully on the door, then quickly stood back.

The prisoner peered into the open doorway not knowing what to expect. Then he saw a shape moving in the gloomy interior. Something humped, moving with a weird slowness.

He held his breath. Was it some kind of animal? A joke? For chrissakes it had to be a joke. A man dressed as an animal with a large paper mache head.

The assembled men waited patiently as if they expected some important dignitary.

At last the humped thing came to the doorway, its watery eyes blinking in the sunlight.

The bound man took a step backward, a reflex action.

It was awful.

He saw it was a woman, just flesh and blood, but nature had taken the woman's fetal cells while still in her mother's womb, stirred them like a child mixing different fizzy drinks at random and then stood back to let humankind taste the result.

And it was a sour creation.

A distored head tapering to a point; heavy jaw overlapping the wrong way; the banana yellow teeth looking like tombstones after an earthquake — slanting every-way imaginable.

But the most striking thing about this tortured, twisted face.

The eyes.

Oh, Jesus, the eyes . . .

They were unforgettable: Watering, squinting beneath a set of eyebrows that looked as thick and as black as moustaches. But by God there was intelligence burning there. They possessed a penetrating shrewdness that made you believe she could read your mind.

Walking with a slow rolling gait she approached the man and looked him up and down. Those two shrewd eyes devouring every clue his clothes and expression revealed.

"Frightened?" she asked in a surprisingly soft voice.

He said nothing. Only swallowed — with difficulty.

She nodded. "You have every reason to be." She looked him up and down again. "Seems healthy." She shot him a penetrating look. "You homosexual?"

He tried to speak in a stammering way but she silenced him with a wave of her twisted hand. "No. You're wearing a wedding ring. Not conclusive proof of course, but we'll have to trust our instincts. It wouldn't do if you were infected. Syphilis, gonorrhoea — Aids. That wouldn't do at all. Now." She held out that twisted hand. "Wallet, Donald."

A younger man obediently plucked a wallet from the back pocket of the man's Levis and handed it to the malformed woman.

"John Edward Wainwright," she read in a voice that oozed a quiet authority. "Address, 31 Hampole Way, Doncaster. Credit cards. Receipt for one colour television, portable. Blood donor card — ah, good sign, a very good sign Mr. Wainwright. You must be a healthy young bull if they want your blood."

Then for the first time she laughed. A strange sighing sound like a very old person trying to catch their breath.

She checked the contents of the wallet thoroughly, missing nothing — raffle tickets, video library membership card and a card at the very back. "Ah, next of kin," read the woman, "Dawn Wainwright. Your wife?"

He nodded mutely, wishing someone would slacken the flex that had now started to bite into his wrists.

The woman looked closely at Wainwright. "Any children?"

Again he just gave the slightest shake of the head.

"Ah . . . A pity. Don't you realise that through your children you are immortal? Your descendants will carry your genes through eternity." For a moment those sharp eyes became almost dreamy. "In five or ten generations, sometime when you are less than dust a little boy of your blood will be born who would have your black hair, with that same curling fringe; he'd look like you, talk like you, have the same habits and dream the same dreams."

"Atavism." The word came automatically to Wainwright's dry lips.

The woman nodded. "Atavism. The recurrence in human beings of hereditary characteristics . . . " She shook her head. "A pity . . . A pity . . ."

Wainwright's eyes, enlarged with fear, stared at the woman. "What are you going to do with me?"

She watched him, weighing him up, then nodded. She had reached a decision.

"This has gone far enough," Wainwright was saying. "It's gone too far. Let me go." He looked about him quickly. "Let me go now and I promise I'll tell no-one. It's just a joke — right? Let me go . . . Oh, come on let me go. Please. Just untie me and I'll just walk away — just go — please. No-one has to know any-"

"He'll do," said the woman nodding again. She'd not listened to a word Wainwright has said. That gargoyle face twisted into a wet-lipped smile. "He'll do very nicely indeed."

The leader of the warriors coughed deferentially before speaking. "Do you want him taking up there now, Mam?"

Mam?

Mam! This mis-shapen creature had borne children! Wainwright's stomach bucked into his throat at the thought of anyone making . . . dammit, actually making love to

the woman, caressing those loose swinging breasts, whispering tender words into the wrinkled ear that hung on the side of her head like a malformed sea shell. Jesus Christ . . .

She nodded. "Take him. Then get ready for tonight." A man pulled Wainwright by the elbow.

The creature stopped in the doorway. "And make sure you don't lose him. This is the important one."

They took Wainwright along the deserted street. He saw the village had an impoverished look stamped across it. Okay, the streets were swept clean, the place was tidy but the houses needed money spending on them. The windows and doors were neatly painted but beneath the bright colours the frames were clearly rotting, some panes had long since cracked. The few cars in the village were old models — all immaculately polished — but now they were being eaten alive by rust.

On they went. By a parked van: it bore the slogan BRAITHWAITES — QUALITY BUTCHERS SINCE 1923; by the pub with the elephant with its eight foot long tongue, by more cottages all with immaculate net curtains that were as white as freshly fallen snow. And then out of the village entirely.

Moments later they arrived at a field of rough grass that had been recently cut short, leaving it with a dull yellow look to it. Here and there stood a few dim-looking sheep that watched the strange group with blank looks. The sheepish eyes saw a group of men tie another man to a solitary oak tree in the middle of the field. There they left him.

The sheep chewed the short grass while contemplating the dazed-looking man. He did nothing. He didn't struggle, shout. Nothing. He just gazed at the man walking back to the village with a dim-looking expression that matched their own.

The tree's shadow had lengthened by an hour by the time Wainwright saw any movement in the village.

Then it all happened at once.

They came.

In a weird procession. Men, women, children.

And leading them, the twisted and humped living gargoyle of a woman. They had changed their clothes. Women and children in Sunday best. Men in the suits they wore for weddings and funerals.

It was what they carried that cast them weird.

They bore long poles, some as high as twenty feet, even washing-line clothes props had been pressed into service. From the top of some poles swung little cages containing pigeons; one pole carried the head of a sheep, probably one of the cousins of the sheep now watching the approaching procession with such impassive expressions on their boney faces.

The most troubling poles carried things that Wainwright could not identify. From some flapped brown leathery sheets the size of pillowcases, from others small cushions made out of wrinkled skin.

As they approached Wainwright could the men's faces were daubed with swirling purple and crimson lines. They again carried the bronze swords and daggers, while bound around their arms were bands of fox fur. This combined with neatly pressed trousers and carefully shined shoes looked downright ludicrous.

Or it should. Except there was something profoundly sinister about it all. The villagers' solemn faces, the gargoyle woman dressed in a billowing dress the colour of peaches.

All in all, there were about two hundred of them. They gathered in a crescent in front of him.

The woman ambled forward accompanied by the . . . there was no other word for it, chief, the man in his fifties who had the bearing of a Borough councillor — a little power and a large ego.

"Mr. Wainwright," said the chief in a strong Yorkshire accent, "you've been picked today in order to help the village of Owston-in-Elmet. That's where we live and where our families have lived for longer than anyone knows."

Christ, it was as if the man was making a speech to open a village fair!

"This has gone far enough." Shouted Wainwright. The flex was cutting the circulation to his fingers, his legs ached, he felt sick; he would be sick if this farce didn't end soon.

The woman said softly, "You will be helping us in a deeper and more profound way than you could have ever dreamed possible."

"Bugger that!" cried Wainwright. "Bugger you! You're all flaming barmy. Let me go.

"Mr. Wainwright you-"

"Shut up you ugly cow! I said, let me bloody-well go or they'll hmmph . . ."

Without a word the chief had stepped forward and driven his muscular fist into

"He held his breath. Was it some kind of animal? A joke? For chrissakes it had to be a joke. A man dressed as an animal with a large paper mache head. The assembled men waited patiently as if they expected some important dignitary. At last the humped thing came to the doorway, its watery eyes blinking in the sunlight."

Wainwright's mouth. Something snapped in his bottom jaw, his lips went numb and a sharp pain stabbed back into his neck.

"In future, lad. Yer keep yer trap shut. Alright?"

Shocked, Wainwright looked down to see blood and saliva dribbling down the front of his *Greenpeace* sweatshirt.

The villagers continued their weird pantomime. It seemed to be some elaborate ritual. Something like small dark biscuits were passed round on white china plates, verses of poetry that made no sense were recited by adults and children alike. Men broke sticks and threw them into the tree. Those that stuck in the branches were applauded; those that stuck on the highest branches were applauded furiously.

The ritual went on and on until the sun rested on the horizon.

At that moment the sound of tractor engines cracked open the still evening air. Three tractors pulling trailers turned into the field. Piled high on the trailers mounds of dry branches shivered and shook as the tractor bounded across the grass.

Then it all became so obvious.

"You're going to burn me aren't you." Wainwright's voice came thickly through swollen lips. "You're going to put me on a bloody bonfire and set me alight."

His calm voice drew a nod of approval from the chief. "Yer learning lad."

With an ugly smile the woman studied his face. "Why on earth would we do that, Mr. Wainwright?"

He managed a half shrug. "You're lunatics. Too much inbreeding. Too much pesticide sprayed too near the village. It's rotted your brains."

She shook her mis-shaped head. "Far from it. We're sane. Saner than anyone else in this mad world." As she talked laughing villagers piled the wood into a huge bonfire. Apart from it being mid-summer, Owston-in-Elmet could have been a village anywhere preparing for a bonfire night celebration. In a detached way he noticed women wrapping potatoes in foil and laying out raw sausages and hamburgers on trays. Once the flames had burned down they were going to turn this thing into a barbecue.

The woman talked in a low eager voice as she watched the preparations. "Look at them — just look at them, lad. They've been doing this twelve thousand years, ever since these hills were covered by glaciers a hundred feet thick. Every year — without fail. And the gods have been good to us. So good we didn't look twice at the Roman Gods, the Celtic gods, and you can keep your cow-eyed Christ God. They're all resoundingly feeble in comparison to ours." She looked at Wainwright pityingly. "Oh, you wouldn't know our Gods if I told you their names. You don't learn about our Gods in Sunday school: you feel them. Like electricity they blast through everything, the tress, the waters, sky, earth, why they even run through you, Mr. Wainwright. Through your thin arms and legs and soft little belly of yours."

Every so often someone would speak to the gargoyle woman. They addressed her as Mam. They did it in an affectionate, but respectful way. And Wainwright realised she wasn't a mother in the physical sense but a matriarchy; a mother to her people; a spiritual leader; an oracle.

"We are a strong community bound by our faith; bound to this valley more tightly than you are bound to this tree." She gave a lop-sided grin. "Do you know why the Gods care for us so deeply?"

Wainwright parted his lips, they stuck slightly where the drying blood had gummed them together. He spoke one word. "Sacrifice."

"That's right. You really are an intelligent young man." She nodded her huge head. "Sacrifice. Each one carried out as tradition dictates." With relish she told him the about the last one. "A man, oh forty-five or so. Manager of a supermarket in Barnsley. Brought him here, like you, Mr. Wainwright, just like you. Stripped him naked, laid him on the ground, face up, buttocks kissing the grass. Paint his chess with clay and the blood of doves. Then Mr. Braithwaite, he's our butcher you see, takes his knife, a thousand years old if it's a day and carefully, carefully slides the tip of the blade beneath this man's white, white skin. He peels the skin back to expose the ribs beneath. Oh he does it with such skill you would marvel, you really would.

"Then the difficult part. He opens up the ribs to expose the beating heart. Oh the man, this little manager of supermarkets, is crying like a little spoilt boy, 'Stop it, stop it, you're hurting, stop it . . . Stop, stop, stop, stop . . . ' Then Mr. Braithwaite carefully cuts the tissue around the heart, and you know, his hand is steady as a rock. A surgeon would envy these hands." She sighed, remembering. "By this time our gentlemen is looking down at his beating heart with eyes that bulge out so far they look fit to burst. And he's begging and pleading us not to touch his heart. 'You don't know what you're doing, you don't know what you're doing,' he keeps repeating. Oh but we do, Mr. Wainwright. We know perfectly. We are making the best investment possible. The Gods will be very grateful."

Wainwright's eyes stared wide. The woman was a sadist.

"Now the part I never grow tired of. The next stage of the ritual is magical. While four warriors hold down our gift to the Gods, Mr. Braithwaite gently lifts out the heart, lays it on the man's bare stomach. There for five minutes it is allowed to beat, still connected to the arteries, still pumping blood perfectly. The man cries: 'Don't touch it, you could damage it — you'd kill me, you'd kill me.' Do you know Mr. Wainwright I really think that the man believed he would still live if we left him alone." She picked a hair from her flap of a mouth. Looked at it, then dropped it to the ground. "Then two warriors, our strongest, take the heart and they lift. They lift and they lift. The man is held down to the earth. He shouts and screams, purple face, wild bulging eyes. Then POP! Out come the lungs like two wet bags. The arteries stretch to, oh, a full yard. Then CRACK! The arteries split under the strain. And you know the blood pressure is so enormous there is a tremendous spray of blood, like a whale's spout. The blood, a fine, fine spray, hangs in the air for a full moment in a beautiful, a gorgeous red fog. It envelopes everyone. It turns the sun into the deepest, deepest red imaginable. It turns the sun into the deepest, deepest red imaginable, the colour of rust. Then . . . Then we burn him on the fire."

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During this, the chief along with a few of the warriors had paused to listen to the woman. They hung onto every word. She was obviously loved and respected by the villagers. To them she was worth her weight in gold. They waited for Wainwright's reaction. Would he beg for mercy, or scream; scream until his mind split.

Then the tall man tied to the tree did what no-one expected.

He laughed.

He laughed, shaking, until his eyes watered and he nearly choked on his own spit.

They exchanged puzzled looks. The gargoyle woman creased her hideous face into a frown. The man forced himself to stop laughing. He looked round at the collection of puzzled expressions. Then he laughed again.

"You are going to do what to me?" he asked when the sobbing laughter had passed from his body.

"Sacrifice you," said the woman, annoyed now.

"You did say sacrifice?" Wainwright was grinning as broadly as his split lip would allow. "Listen to me, people of whatever-it-is-in-Elmet, you do not know the meaning of the word sacrifice."

"Shut your mouth," snarled the chief, "or I'll hack out that bloody tongue of yours myself."

"Suit yourself. But you're making a hell of a mistake."

"What would you know?" hissed the she-gargoyle.

"Okay, don't believe me. But just look around. Your village is falling to pieces. The houses are shabby. Just look at your children. There can't be more than a dozen here. A population this size would have double that."

"Stop him," hissed the woman.

"Why stop me? I'm doing you a favour. I'm correcting your mistake. You're a farming community, right? Listen, someone tell me. Has your milk yield gone up or down in the last five years?"

One of the younger men started to speak but the woman silenced him with a glare.

Wainwright nodded, smiling. "That proves it. You're falling out of favour with your Gods because you don't know what to give!"

The chief gritted his teeth. "A life is the most precious thing you can give!"

Wainwright shook his head. "Tell me this. If you go to that wishing well of yours to make a wish, do you look on the ground for a pebble or piece of broken glass to throw in?"

"Don't be stupid," sneered one of the younger ones, "you throw money in."

"Exactly." Wainwright looked flushed. Excited. "Money. Cash. Coins. Money you could buy a beer with or put toward a new tyre for your car. You throw in something

"'This has gone far enough,' Wainwright was saying. 'It's gone too far. Let me go.' He looked about him quickly. 'Let me go now and I promise I'll tell no-one. It's just a joke — right? Let me go . . . Oh, come on let me go. Please. Just untie me and I'll just walk away — just go — please. No-one has to know any-'"

you value. Listen, how many times have you said 'I'll sacrifice going to the pub tonight so I can buy a new jacket on Saturday'. When you give something up you enjoy or you value you talk of sacrificing it." Wainwright's eyes shone. "Now you talk of sacrificing me to your Gods?"

"Aye, and we will," snapped the woman.

Wainwright looked at the chief. "So you value me?"

The chief looked uncertain.

"Well am I your friend? No. Because you don't know me. I'm just a stranger from a race of people you despise. I don't mean a toss to you lot. You tie me up, you give me nothing to eat, drink, you punched me. I mean nothing." He talked faster, triumph powering his voice. "I'm just something you picked up from the moor. You might as well pick up a piece of old chewing gum and drop it in the wishing well. Would that please the fairy in the bottom of the well? Would killing me please your Gods? Of course it bloody wouldn't! You value money. When you drop it in the wishing-well you are sacrificing it. To please the Gods you must give up something you love, something you treasure. It must be something you do not want to give but you know you must please them." The men looked at one another, their confidence gone, their demeanour changed. "Now," said Wainwright confidently. "In all your village who do you value the most?"

Without hesitation they all looked at the woman.

"Nonsense," she squealed. "Nonsense, nonsense, nonsense."

But the warrior's attentions were locked tight on their spiritual leader — and the most treasured member of the village. For a moment the chief appeared to be engaged in a massive internal struggle.

Then his face cleared. It would pain them all; they would grieve: yet it must be done. Gently, reverently, he took her by the arm. "Mr. Braithwaite," he called in a hoarse voice. "Mr. Braithwaite. It's time for you to come now."

Wainwright had only chance to briefly see the gargoyle-woman's face twisted into an expression of horror.

Her sharp eyes darted from side to side, seeing each face in turn. And recognizing what lay in each expression. Perhaps for a moment she really could read minds — for without a shadow of a doubt she knew there and then what her beloved people would do to her. Then they crowded round her and she disappeared from sight.

No-one watched the tall man tied to the tree. He was of no value. No-one wanted to know.

It took no time at all for him to slip his arms from his bonds and step out from the flex looped about his legs. Silently he walked away up the hill. Below, the people of Owston-in-Elmet did what they've always done. Before Christ hung from his cross. Before the first Pharoah raised the first pyramid from out of the desert. Before the wheel.

He walked quickly now, his limbs unaffected by the time spent tied to the tree. His stride lengthened. There was somewhere he had to go.

Behind him a blurred yellow glow wavered in the valley below, gouts of smoke rose into the darkening sky to kiss the stars like forbidden lovers.

Presently the tall man reached a lake. Its deep waters reflected the stars until it looked as if a chunk of the universe in miniature had fallen on the Yorkshire landscape.

Anyone watching the man, who the villagers of Owston-in-Elmet had thought was a common town-dweller, would have noticed a change. He looked taller still. Until his shoulders were level with the trees. His face had absorbed a smokey look, shadows formed a cloak around his shoulders. Of his town-dweller clothes there was no sign.

He looked into the waters. And the waters looked into him. A face, smokey, similar but no reflection appeared on the water. "Success, brother Earth?"

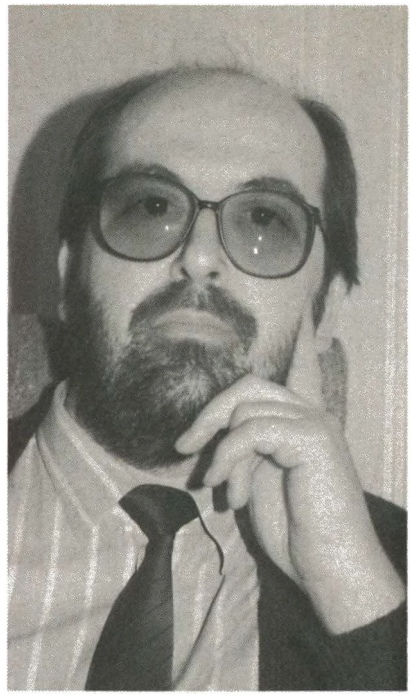
The smokey head above nodded. "Success, brother Water." And above and around them the night winds that blew the lonely spirits from this world to the next murmered their vaporous approval.

Tonight, the old ones were satisfied: The gnawing hunger within appeased.

But this . . . this was only a beginning . . .

"Mam! This mis-shapen creature had borne children! Wainwright's stomach bucked into his throat at the thought of anyone making . . . dammit, actually making love to the woman, caressing those loose swinging breasts, whispering tender words into the wrinkled ear that hung on the side of her head like a malformed sea shell. Jesus Christ . . ."

CASTING THE NET



This issue's review column casts the net wide: horror comic adaptations, the rebirth of the PAN BOOK OF HORROR, Shaun Hutson, German teenagers in ZOMBIE '90 and so much more, courtesy of editor Dave Reeder.

So why doesn't SKELETON CREW have a regular review column or two, then? That's a common enough question and, to be frank, I've lost track of how many times I've been asked it. And my answer? Up till now, it's been that I didn't want just to repeat the tired formulas that every other magazine in this genre overuses.

They can be categorised as either reviewing everything that moves or reviewing whatever is sitting in the office on the day the column is written. I've got no real problem with that; it just seems dumb for us to do exactly the same. Why? Because you need to address the problem of what a review is supposed to be doing — helping the readership or helping the advertising department to sell advertising in the magazine?

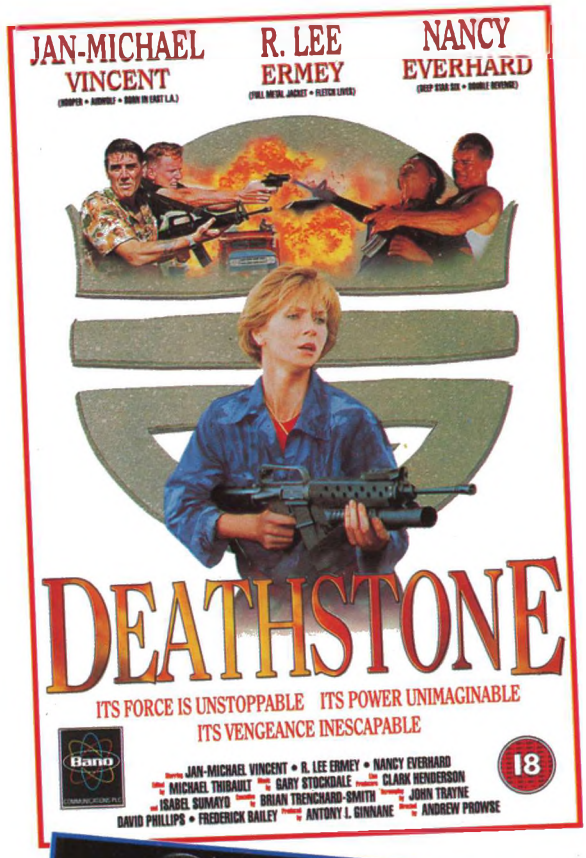
I prefer the first and, I suspect, so do the readers. Yet, when I read reviews, I want more than just a few lines describing the plot and saying whether the reviewer found it good or not; importantly, I want to know more about the reviewer. I want to understand their likes and dislikes, I need to understand how any particular review relates to others, I must understand their perspective. So pages of reviews by loads of people do nothing for me — how can I rely on their words, if I can't relate to them.

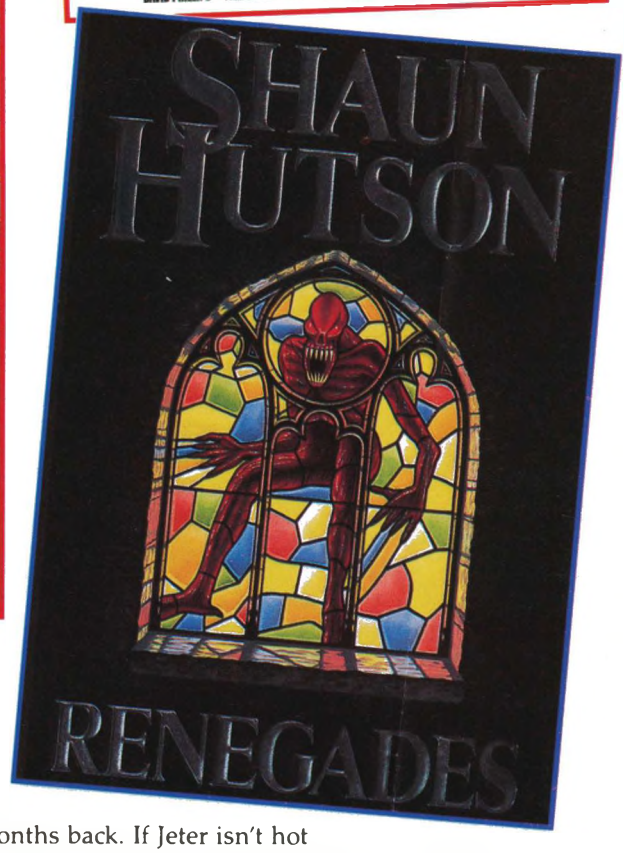
All of which brings us, circuitously as ever, to the new, improved SKELETON CREW review section. Each issue, starting with me (I'm cheap and I'm here), a reviewer whose reputation will precede them will cast a part jaundiced and part enthusiastic eye over the horror goodies they've come across during the last month — books, films, plays, music, comics, art, whatever.

So, jumping right in, let's discuss what I've seen lately. We've been as guilty as many other magazines of catching up with the good work that Pan (under editorial supremo — or suprema? — Kathy Gale) is doing. A comprehensive relaunch of the whole horror, SF and fantasy line, a lot of promotional work and some worthy new titles is what. And I've just spent a day or two catching up — beginning with DARK VOICES 2 (£3.99), edited by David Sutton and Stephen Jones, the new incarnation of that old stalwart THE PAN BOOK OF HORROR STORIES. I guess there isn't one of us that didn't take our first faltering steps down this genre road without the help of the Pan series, edited for more than two decades by Herbert van Thal. I certainly did and still shudder with unease at the thought of some of the stories I first encountered there in my teens — the rat that ate its way out through the victim's body ('The Copper Bowl') and the mad scientist whose collection of victims had all their bones removed so that they flapped helplessly like human seals (no, I can't remember the name and, no, I ain't looking it up — I'm still scared!).

Sadly, the series went into near terminal decline in the 1980s with a loss of focus and an over-reliance on a small bunch of contributors; now the editorial team that has won a shelful of awards for FANTASY TALES has turned the series around. This is a great package: a good mixture of new names and established authors, plus a return to the unpleasantness of story that always characterised the early volumes of the series. Stand-out stories include Brian Lumley's reprinted 'The Sun, The Sea and the Silent Scream' offering the classic Pan creepy-crawly story and newcomer Michael Marshall Smith's 'The Man Who Drew Cats' delivering imaginative fantasy in spades. A couple of criticisms, perhaps — there's a slightly unwholesome air of misogyny about the first handful of stories and there's too long a gap between volumes. An annual series? Quarterly would be better. Still, welcome back to an old friend whose bound to help raise the next generation of deviates.

KW Jeter's SOUL EATER (Pan, £3.99) may do so as well, given that it's being heavily recommended by Ramsey Campbell — 'oppressively intense and hallucinatorily vivid' — and the Pan staff, who are talking him up a storm. Great, 'cept this first appeared eight years ago and Jeter is better known as a science fiction author — check Grafton's FAREWELL HORIZONTAL, for instance. But I've no problem with the praise — the book is superb and takes the 'possessed child' sub-genre as far from cliche as we could wish. He's a surprisingly calculated writer, never wasting words, but still drawing potent pictures with minimalist skill. Maybe that's why Campbell is so hot for him — stylistically, there's a lot in common. The plot? Well, we've been here before and we won't linger, but the descriptive power makes it worth seeking out, together with anything else you can find — a short in MIDNIGHT GRAFFITI 5, for


JAN-MICHAEL VINCENT
R. LEE ERMEY
NANCY EVERHARD
DEATHSTONE
ITS FORCE IS UNSTOPPABLE ITS POWER UNIMAGINABLE
ITS VENGEANCE INESCAPABLE
Hand
18
JAN-MICHAEL VINCENT • R. LEE ERMEY • NANCY EVERHARD
MICHAEL THIBAULT • GARY STOCKDALE • CLARK HENDERSON
ISABEL SUMAYO • BRIAN TRENCHARD-SMITH • JOHN TRAYNE
DAVID PHILLIPS • FREDERICK BAILEY • ANTONY I. GINNANE • ANDREW PROWSE



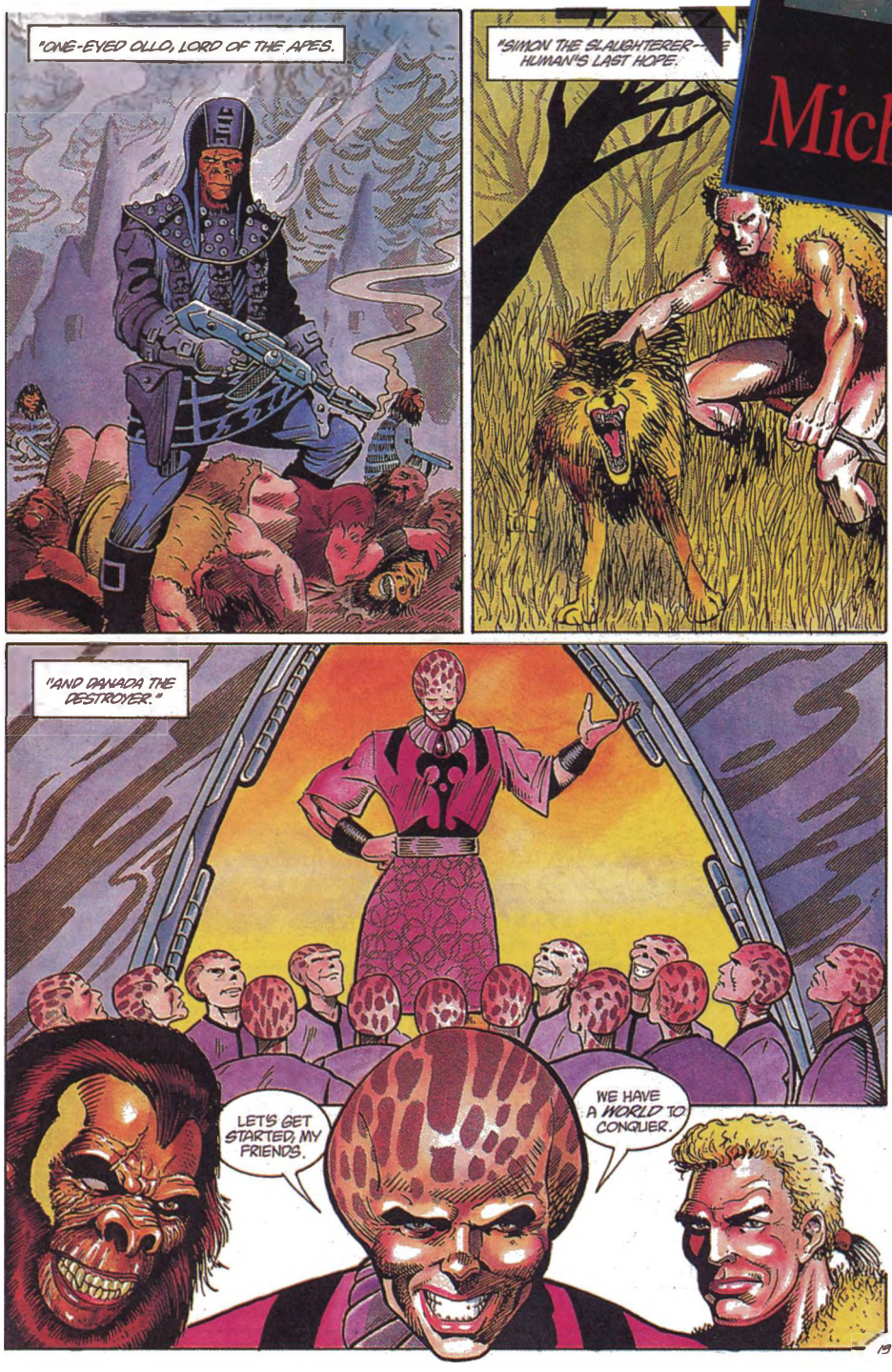
instance, a few months back. If Jeter isn't hot by the time you read this, it's only a matter of time — go for it!

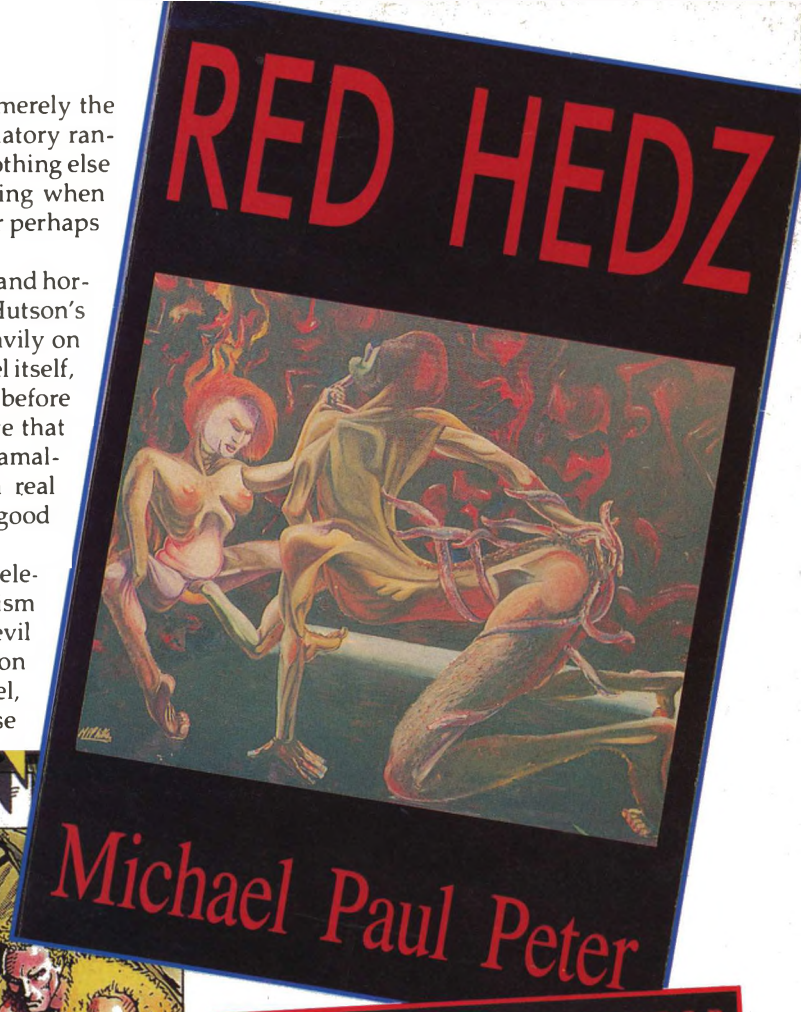
On to stranger territory, we have Michael Paul Peter's RED HEDZ (Creation Press, £5.95), which is it is claimed to be merely the first part of artist Mike Philbin's TRIPLE TESTIMONY trilogy; to be completed by Vierland Brecke's SCENTIENT SUITE and Jane Lou-Xis' DEFACER. One might think was all an elaborate practical joke, except for the power of the writing and the existence of the artist's paintings out here in the real world. The book is a diseased spiral down into the alcoholic madness of painter Kasparek, his discovery of a new world of 'psychosexual tyranny and mutation'. We're clearly quite a way from Kansas here, seeing as the book takes the

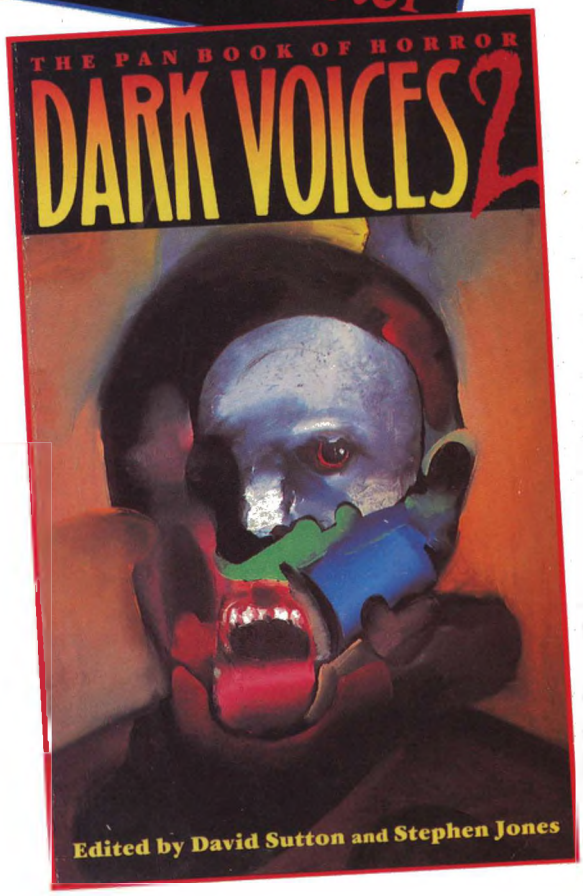
work of writers like William Burroughs and Clive Barker as merely the starting point for a mixture of poetry, cut up fiction, hallucinatory rantings and keenly observed characterisation. In short, it's like nothing else I've read for ages; I'm not sure if I liked it, but it's encouraging when artists push away at the limits. If you aren't easily disturbed (or perhaps if you are, but value that experience) then give this a try.

However, if your tastes run more to the mainstream of newstand horror then you've probably already devoured Shaun Hutson's RENEGADES (Macdonald, £12.95), with a cover drawing heavily on the ALIEN culture. What's interesting here, more than the novel itself, is the way that horror writers like Hutson and James Herbert before him seek to write increasingly serious horror novels — a route that also, perhaps inevitably, leads to the books becoming more amalgams of horror novels and sub-James Follett thrillers than real breakthroughs in the genre itself. In other words, bloody good reads but not that intellectually challenging.

The latest Hutson moves easily enough between its various elements — the search for immortality and the fight against terrorism merging at last into a semi-apocalyptic struggle for good or evil and all that. It's certainly a great page turner but I do wish Hutson would slow down a touch and try for the thoughtful novel, instead of the gut embracing of violence and shock. And those


"ONE-EYED OLLO, LORD OF THE APES.
"SIMON THE SLAUGHTERER—HUMAN'S LAST HOPE.
"AND DANADA THE DESTROYER."
LET'S GET STARTED, MY FRIENDS.
WE HAVE A WORLD TO CONQUER.





annoying writer's tricks emerge again — the page after page with single line paragraphs. Still, amusing enough — you might even say it's like Guy N Smith's SABAT novels, but twice the length and written at a slightly less frenetic pace. Or you might imagine Nigel Kneale's Quartermass meeting THE AVENGERS written, in the immortal words of THE SUNDAY TIMES, by 'literature's answer to Alice Cooper' — wicked.

Forthcoming from Tor in the States is an intriguing new anthology edited by Robert Bloch, PSYCHO-PATHS ($18.95), embracing yet again the subject matter that he has made his own, in the public eye at least. Ironically, Bloch has written extensively about the psychopath yet it's only the Hitchcock connection that makes PSYCHO live on — his other novels lie forgotten. More interesting prhaps for his fervent introduction on the state of modern horror — nailing his colours to the masts of Poe, Machen and Lovecraft, whilst welcoming the insights that splatterpunk is delivering — than for any particular story, it's worth seeking out. It's chockfull of great names, of course — Morrell, Grant, Wilson, Nolan, Etchison, Yarbro, Schow, Cave and Tem, to name just some — and hurt only by the lack of fiction from Bloch himself. I wish there was a mass market for collections like this; sadly, I think that unlikely.

On to something lighter — an intriguing new comic from Eternity called PUPPET MASTER, based on the 1989 movie. Taking the film (and its sequel, PUPPET MASTER II) merely as a starting point, it fills in details of the story, pre-films. Want to know how Puppet Master Toulon first tried to bring his wife back to life in the body of her favourite puppert? Check out the comic — accomplished artwork by Glenn Lumsden makes it a treat.

In fact, Eternity's parent company Malibu Graphics looks like being an intriguing publisher for those of us who enjoy both films and comics — there's also the PUPPET MASTER COMIC COMPANION (uncensored photos plus storyboards), the crossover APE NATION title (PLANET OF THE APES meets ALIEN NATION!), ongoing PLANET OF THE APES comics and specials, a (Sheridan le Fanu) CARMILLA special, DEAD AND BURIED? and — you won't believe it till you see it — an authorised adaptation of Herschell Gordon Lewis' all-time splatter classic, BLOOD FEAST, with a special uncut screenplay volume also released (remember the PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE one?). How many of these will escape the close attentions of the UK customs is a moot point, but go and ask for them now in your local comic shops.

And thinking of gore, I've enjoyed the subtle words behind the Koszowski gore cover of VOLLMOND 3, a fanzine edited by Andre Paine (£1.85 from 19 Mascalls Park, Paddock Wood, Tonbridge, Kent). Those of us who've spent time labouring in the fanzine field (you might find copies of the BFS BULLETIN, FANTASY MACABRE or SHOCK XPRESS I edited if you delve into your collections) tend to have a lot of time for it — it's a great way of building a reputation that eases your path to professional status as well as a way of experimenting without too much risk. What's great is the continued involvement of both the professional (Brian Lumley's A THING ABOUT CARS is great fun) and semi-professional writer (DF Lewis' DOWN BY THE FAST CANAL builds on his growing reputation), as well as artists (Steve Skwarek — our portfolio artist two issues back — has some great Machen pictures here). This might seem expensive but it's one of the more intriguing I've seen recently, even if the production needs a considerable lift.

That'sprobably not a criticism that would carry much weight with the editor of TRASH COMPACTOR, 'a magazine of our disposable culture' that takes the PSYCHOTRONIC road with a vengeance in the latest issue (Fall 1990, $3.50 from specialist outlets). It's one of those magazines that you never dreamed you wanted but can't live without having seen it — I mean, haven't you always wanted a complete career guide of ultracrass actor/director John Ashley — HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER, HOW TO STUFF A WILD BIKINI, THE BEAST OF BLOOD and many more. Throw in some great posters for WOMEN IN CHAINS ("Women get strange ideas, when they're chained together a thousand miles from nowhere after a thousand nights without a man."), HELL ON WHEELS ("The action is go...when a hot-head meets a heavy-foot on a fast track and the girls love it!"), THE BLACK KLANSMAN and much more for a great package. Sleazy but fun.

Simply sleazy is this issue's first film: Steve Aquilina's ZOMBIE '90. Imagine a home movie about zombies shot and acted by German teenagers and you begin the descent into the maelstrom of misguided talent that is Reel Gore Productions (Rudolf-Kinau Weg1, 2082 Uetersen, West Germany). In fact, it's hard to know which is least convincing — the acting, the directing, the plot, the special effects (loads of pseudo gore with entrails, dismemberment and the like) or the whole effect. What is astoundingly funny, however, is the dubbing — remember these are white German teenagers — which consists of very black American middle age voices: 'Sheet. Time to kick zombie ass'. And so on. There's also another film offered: VIOLENT SHIT. I don't

think I'm strong enough, to be honest with you.

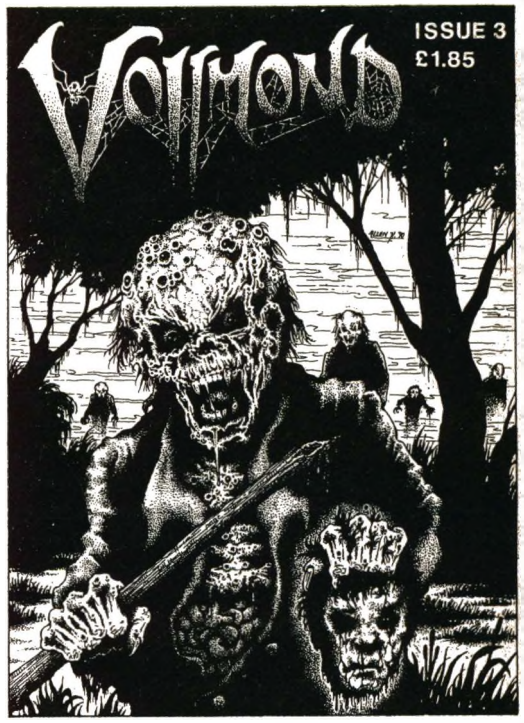
Rather more to my taste is the return of Fred Olen Ray, whose 1989 ALIENATOR is well worth the effort to track down, if only to see PJ Soles in a movie without wearing a baseball cap. Ray occupies that territory halfway between the rock-bottom sleazoids (Ormsby, Lewis et al) and the real world — his heart's in the right place but his budget is always tight. So we open with some great spaceship models, spend a bit of time in a two set space ship and then zip to Earth and some cheap location shooting in a wood in Colorado. The plot is endlessly derivative — misunderstood criminal escapes from execution chamber, flees to Earth, befriends a group of disparate characters, who then fight the Alienator send to kill him. She, dressed in sub-Sybil Danning cast-offs from BATTLE BEYOND THE STARS, succeeds and we end the film no wiser. Unless you're a PJ Soles fan, of course — she's the conscience struck flight technician who can't flick the switch and fry the villain. Conscienceless Jan-Michael Vincent does do it, naturally, in a performance so interchangeable with every other performance he's ever given from DAMNATION ALLEY to AIRWOLF to DEATHSTONE, that he's in danger of exposing his severe limitations soon.

DEATHSTONE from Bano, incidentally, fills in an hour and a half quite satisfactorily, with Andrew Prowse keeping a fairly tight hand on the Phillipine-set action. More an action thriller than a natural for SKELETON CREW, the film sets US Marines and ex-Marine Vincent against vicious street gangs, the whole only enlivened by an ancient Chinese curse unleashed when a tomb of a warrior priest is opened by journalist Nancy Everhard. She's the best part of the film, a fresh actress who is taken over by the deathstone curse — catch this just for the scenes when she unleashes it. Apart from that, there's an awful lot of shooting and enough shots of the back streets of Manila to put you off travelling there.

Another place not to travel to, unless you're really dumb, is Mount Dora, Florida — the setting of the seemingly New England-based shocker WITCH STORY. An interesting combination of the demonic child and the teenagers in peril in a deserted house sub-genres, it manages to rise above both of them and if it finally fails to succeed on a completely satisfying level, then it's not from lack of trying.

Italian director Alessandro Capone, with a complete Italian production team, brought this in for one and a half million dollars — but it doesn't look that cheap. Sure, most of the cast are young unknowns; sure, the house used as the main set is for real; but it's impressive all the same for a first feature. A witch is killed and her daughter throws herself to her death from a window of the house. Sixty years later, a group of college graduates take over the house for a summer vacation and, one by one, are either taken over or killed by the child. Only an unfrocked priest can help. Interestingly, although there are references throughout to any number of horror films (THE EVIL DEAD, THE HOUSE BY THE CEMETARY, THE OMEN, etc), it avoids the one big cliche of the modern horror — there is no nudity amongst a cast of young, attractive actresses. That alone makes this an oddity worth tracking down.

Still, I enjoyed it. Somehow there was a freshness and vitality to it, lacking in so much else at present. All too often, one senses that the drive to maximise the current horror boom is resulting in material being rushed to the market before it's really ready. A return to our roots is called for, I think. Certainly, the majority of the items I've spoken about manage to do that — poorly executed or sublime, most offer an original vision. I'll drink to that.



COMPETITION

Thanks to those kind souls at Medusa, we have a bundle of WITCH STORY videos to give away, together with some ALIENATOR films, from Prism. One or both will go to the first correct winners we draw from our postbag, closing date February 15th.

And all you have to do is answer the following questions:

1. Name two other horror films with the word 'witch' in the title.
2. Name at least one other horror film starring PJ Soles.
3. Name either one other Fred Olen Ray movie or the names of three other Italian horror film directors.

Nothing to it, huh? Send your answers on a postcard (marked 'Witch Alien? Competition') to the editorial address — see the contents page for that. As ever, no employees of Medusa or Argus may apply — those are the breaks, guys!

New to gaming? Unsure what your next move should be? Don't know where to turn? Let Liz Holliday be your guider.

ROLL ON!

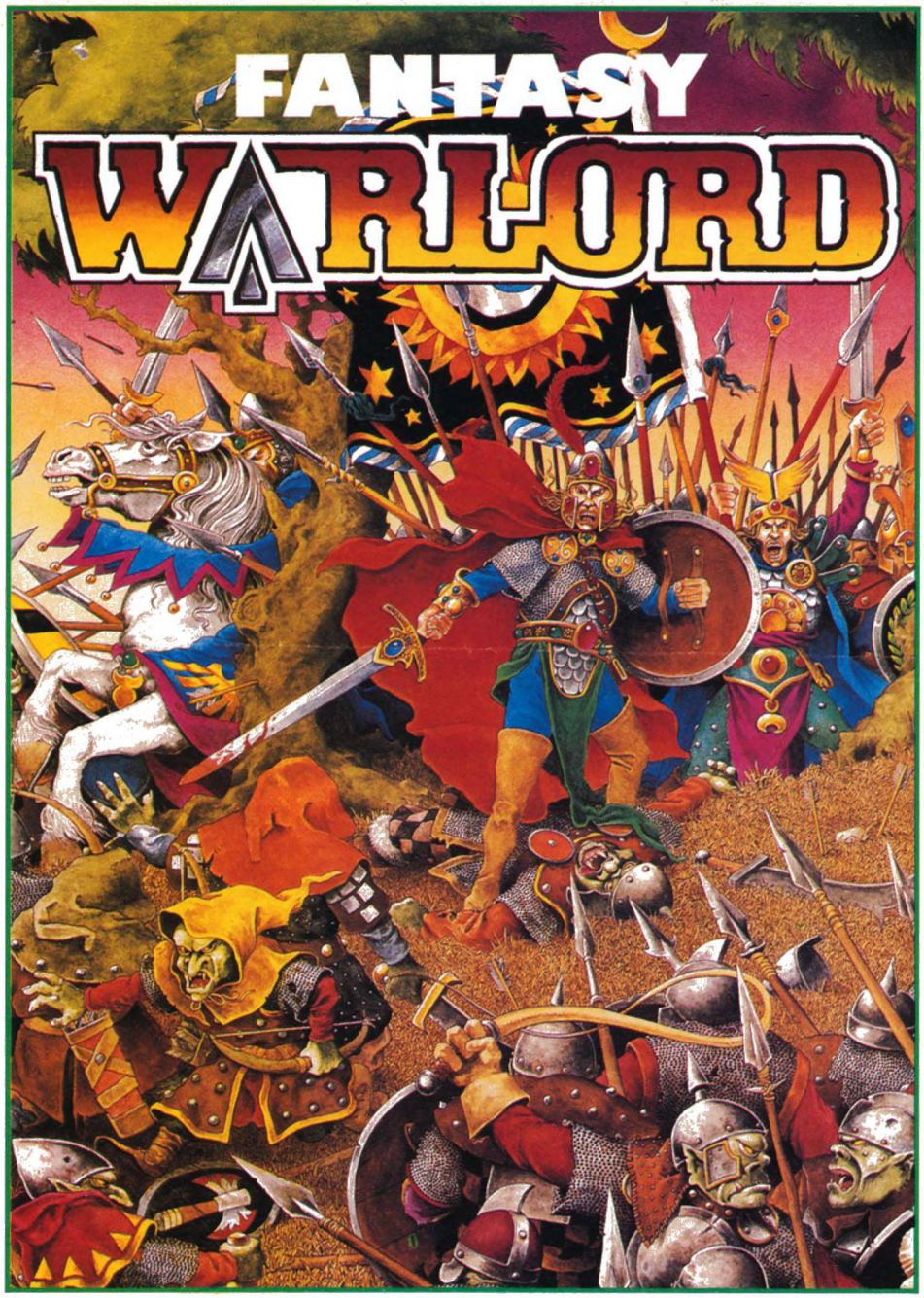
You have waded through reams of rules. You have generated sample characters, and played the introductory scenario included in the package. Maybe you've even bought and run one or two full length modules. What do you do next? The obvious answer is (assuming you've enjoyed yourself so far) that you keep on playing. If you have more money than time, you may opt for buying more modules, or perhaps a campaign setting. On the other hand, you may be feeling broke or particularly adventurous, and want to design your own games.

Whichever you choose, you will find that you need some or all of: more players (because having a large pool of people means that no-one gets stuck refereeing if they don't want to; so that games can be played even if a few people are away; and so that there are more points of view and styles of play available), more information (because rules are often obscure, and because writing really good games is a lot harder than it seems at first) or more equipment (because it makes the games more visual, easier and fun — and besides, you wouldn't like the manufacturers to go out of business, would you?).

The question then becomes where to find these things. There are three main sources: magazines, shops and conventions.

Magazines first. They provide three kinds of information: articles about gaming, adverts about shops, and classified ads, which you can use to make contact with gamers in your area.

Unfortunately, WHITE DWARF, the glossiest and most widely available magazine is also the one of least general use. Let me re-phrase that. WHITE DWARF is undoubtedly invaluable if you play WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLE PLAYING or its sister

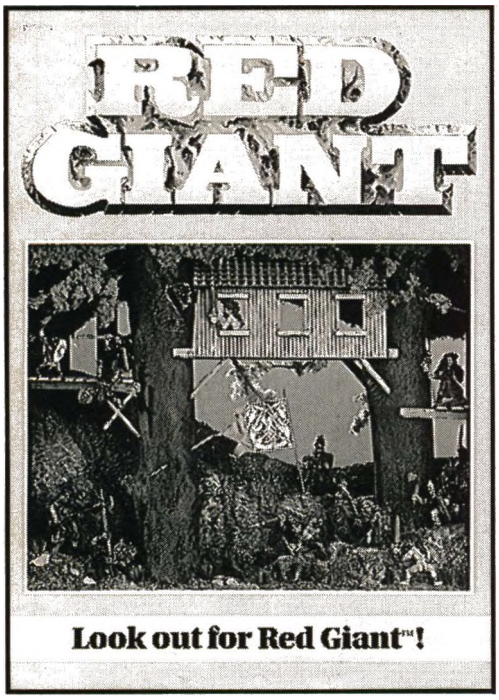


"If you have more money than time, you may opt for buying more modules, or perhaps a campaign setting. On the other hand, you may be feeling broke or particularly adventurous, and want to design your own games."

games such as SPACE HULK or WARHAMMER 40K. These are all published by the ubiquitous GAMES WORKSHOP, as is WHITE DWARF itself. The magazine makes no pretence of covering games from other companies, though this has not always been the case. So WHITE DWARF is only of use if you play GAMES WORKSHOP games. No longer has a free notice-board section.

DRAGON magazine is published by TSR, manufacturers of AD&D. The magazine obviously has a lot of material about this game, but also covers other TSR games, notably MARVEL SUPER-HEROES. It sometimes has articles on systems from other companies, and much of the material is easy to adapt anyway. It also has a good computer column (though, being American, it is heavily biased towards IBM and Macintosh) and a book review section which makes a point of commenting on which books have good games potential. It has a convention listing column, but this is heavily biased. No personal contact ads, but many of the commercial display ads are British. My personal favourite.

GMI is a resurrected version of GM magazine, which died and was taken over by Newsfield Publications. It is too soon to say how successful the magazine is going to be, but early indications are promising. Unlike WHITE DWARF and DRAGON, GMI is not connected to a games company. Consequently, it is able to cover a wider range of material, and may be a better bet if your interests run to say, TRAVELLER or SHADOWRUN rather than WARHAMMER or



D&D. Classified ads for second hand games and player contact are 10p per word.

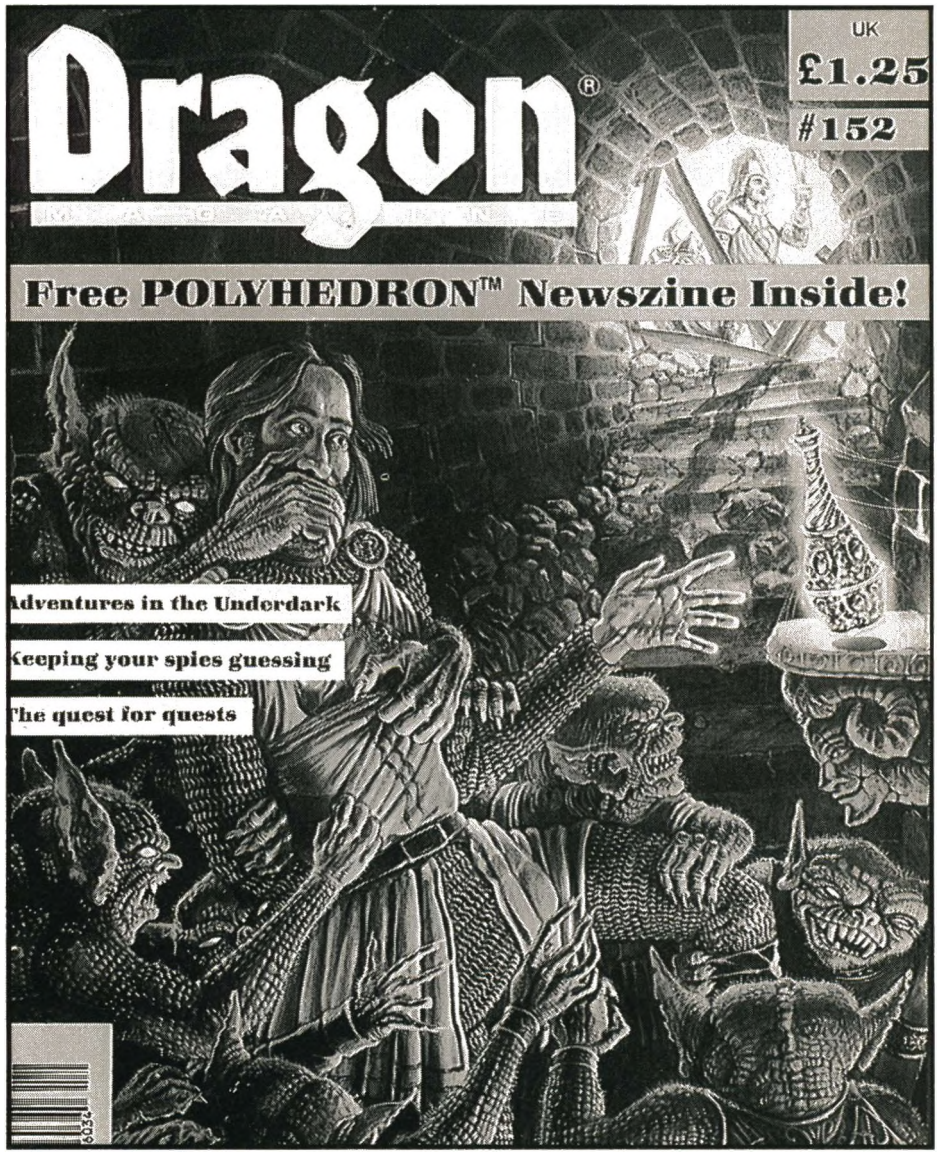
RED GIANT is the newest of magazines. At the time of writing, I have only seen issue one. When I heard about this, I assumed it was a spoof — after all the name does encourage that view. However, if so, it is an expensive one — it has a full colour cover, and, I am assured, distribution through WH Smiths as well as specialist games shops. Presumably, it will aim for wide coverage to exploit its independent status. Time will tell.

I've stressed above the kinds of coverage games can expect in the various magazines. But magazines also provide another source of information: adverts. Probably the best way to find a shop you like is by word of mouth. That, of course, means knowing people in the first place.

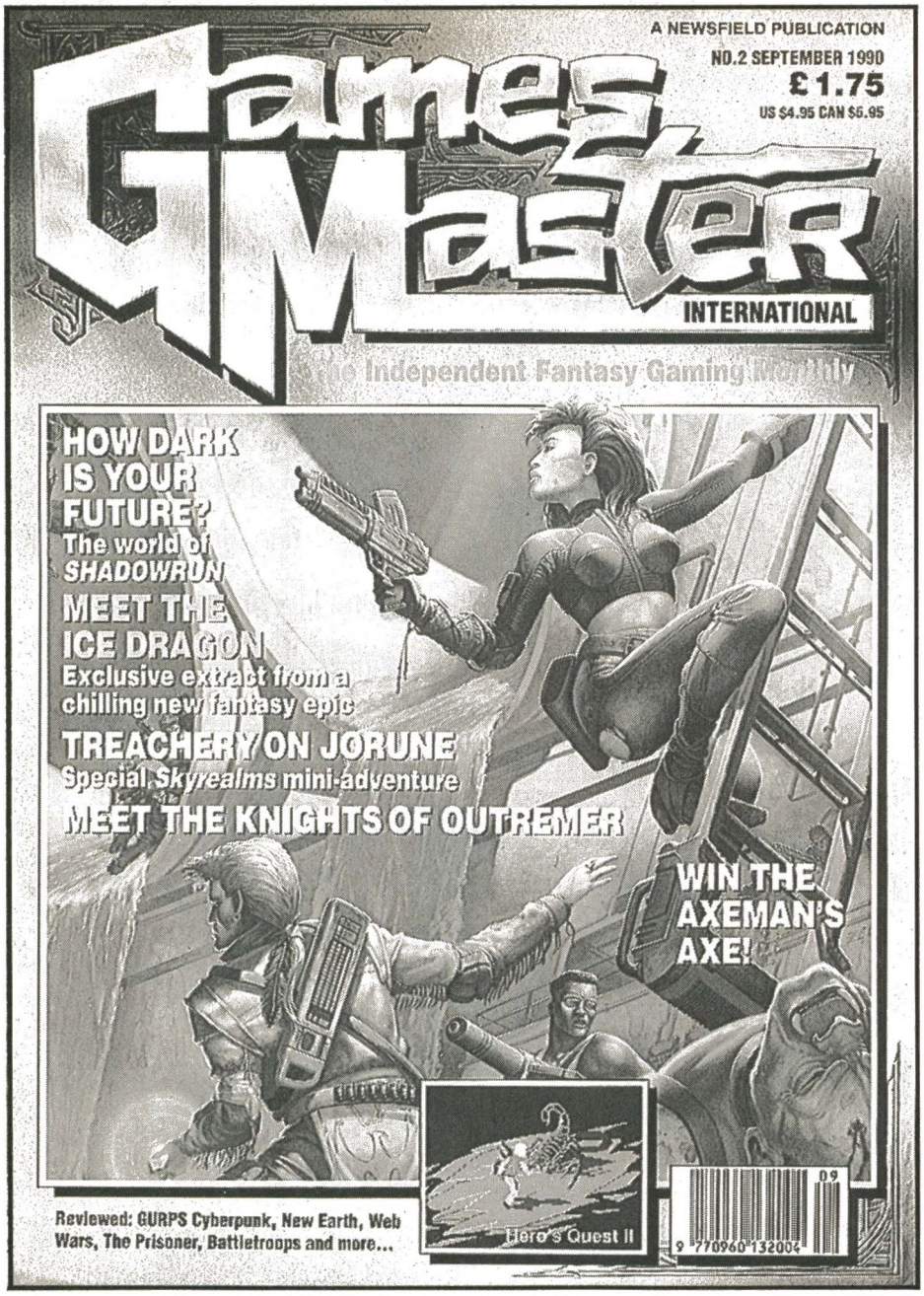
While your local toy shop may stock a few products, you'll be lucky to find any figures except the ubiquitous blister-packed CITADEL MINIATURES (and if you're very lucky, maybe some GRENADIER). It would be easy to think that gaming stopped there. It isn't so. What follows is a very personal rundown of some specialist shops in the London area. They are all shops I know, and will serve to show the range of what is available. It isn't exhaustive! If a shop isn't here, it simply means I've never visited it probably because it was too far away.

I have a personal tendency to like the independent retailers. This isn't to knock, for instance, GAMES WORKSHOP's chain of outlets (though again, it's necessary to note their bias towards their own-brand product), or the big VIRGIN GAMES CENTRE in London's Oxford Street. The staff of both are knowledgeable, but by necessity rushed off their feet and without the opportunity to get to know the customers.

Me, I shop at ORCS' NEST if I feel like feeling a bit weird (because of the decorations in the shop, and because it is usually good for hard to get items) or in JUST GAMES because the staff are friendly. My favourite shop was GAMES PEOPLE PLAY, late of Notting Hill; but it seems it ceased trading at about the same time as I



"The thing that made it stand out was its figures display — no rotten blister packs to jiggle up and down, desperately trying to figure out whether the contents are actually dark elves or ninjas!"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Hero's Quest II

"I've stressed above the kinds of coverage games can expect in the various magazines. But magazines also provide another source of information: adverts. Probably the best way to find a shop you like is by word of mouth. That, of course, means knowing people in the first place."

moved nearby. The thing that made it stand out was its figures display — no rotten blister packs to jiggle up and down, desperately trying to figure out whether the contents are actually dark elves or ninjas! GAMERS IN EXILE scores well on this, but is rather biased towards wargaming for my needs. (They'd also like you to know that their choice for best beginner's game is DRAGONSROAR, famous for its get started quick approach and audio tape rules run through — and infamous for its war-hedgehogs and man-elephants). I also like LEISURE GAMES up in Finchley, whose staff are friendly and knowledgeable, and less daunting than some teeny-gamers, especially if you are (like me) thirtysomething!

One other thing to look for: a notice board where you can advertise player contacts (trying to sell second hand equipment is a bit naughty though — it's probably polite to check with the staff first!).

I can almost hear the cries of "London Bias" echoing out as I type. Sorry about that. If I claimed a knowledge of shops elsewhere, I be lying. Your best bet is to check the magazines for adverts, then go and see for yourself.

If you can't do that, your only alternative is mail order. GAMES WORKSHOP and TSR, naturally enough, run services for their own product. ESDEVIUM has a shop as well as a good postal service, with a huge range, and have been going mail order for years. Good for obscure staff. Can't comment on other mail order services, because I haven't used them.

There are some general guidelines you should follow when using such a service. First, ALWAYS phone to check that what you want is in stock, and that the price and postage is as advertised. Adverts have to placed some time in advance, and situations can change rapidly, especially when goods are imported. Second, don't send cash, send a postal order or cheque: keep a note of the date and what you ordered. Third, do

allow a reasonable time for delivery, say 28 days. If there are problems, remember that a polite approach will almost always get a better response than huffing and puffing.

Lastly, conventions. GAMES WORKSHOP hold various painting competitions and events, including DRAGONDAYS around the country. As ever, for GAME WORKSHOP products only. Details from their shops or WHITE DWARF. TSR organise the residential convention GAMESFAIR in the spring, and this year for the first time in Europe. EUROPEAN GENCON in the winter. They also sponsor GAMESCON, a one day event held in Basildon in October (my favourite because it is fairly small and has a relaxed atmosphere.)

These conventions all have things in common, yet each has its own flavour. The TSR conventions always feature an AD&D Open Competition. At GAMESFAIR this is taken very seriously, which may actually detract from the enjoyment of playing. Yet the same thing at GAMESCON is much more relaxed and friendly. GAMESFAIR also features the TEAM COMPETITION, which is the scene of much (often drunken) silliness. This year there will also be MINDGAMES at the Novotel Hotel in Hammersmith, London. I can't comment about this or GENCON because they haven't happened yet.

I haven't been to a GAMES WORKSHOP event in years, but their self-confessed marketing strategy aims pretty much at boys of 14 to 16, if that tells you anything.

All the conventions provide space for people to bring games of their own to run, be it part of a home-brewed campaign or a module you happen to have had your eye on. They are good places to make new friends, and try out new game systems and styles of play. They almost always have dealer tables, so you can get to know different shops. They are good places to pick up second hand bargains, and to investigate fanzines. Oh yes, and to have a good time.

"All the conventions provide space for people to bring games of their own to run, be it part of a home-brewed campaign or a module you happen to have had your eye on. They are good places to make new friends, and try out new game systems and styles of play."

Addresses

Games Workshop, The Plaza, Oxford Street W1 (and branches)
Virgin Games, 100 Oxford Street, W1 (and Virgin megastore branches)
Esdevium Games 185, Victoria Road, Aldershot, Hants
Gamers In Exile, 283 Pentonville Rd N1
Just Games, Brewer Street, London W1
Leisure Games, Brewer Street, London W1
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Orc's Nest, 6, Earlham Street, London WC2

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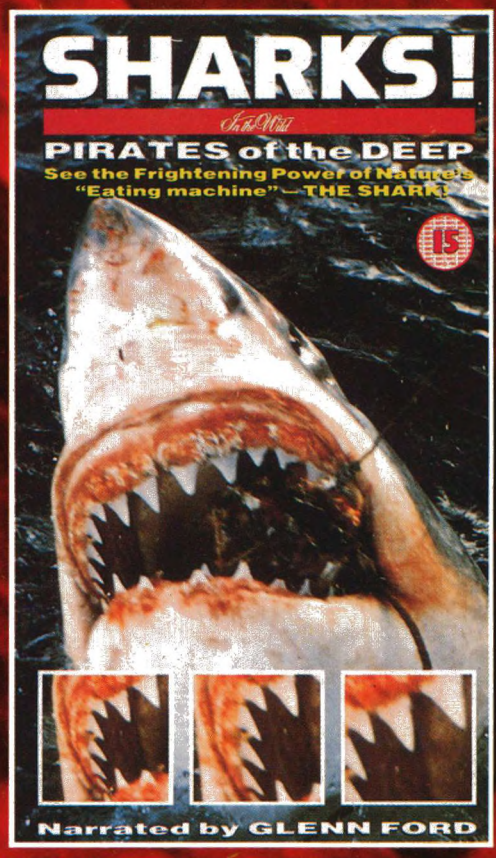
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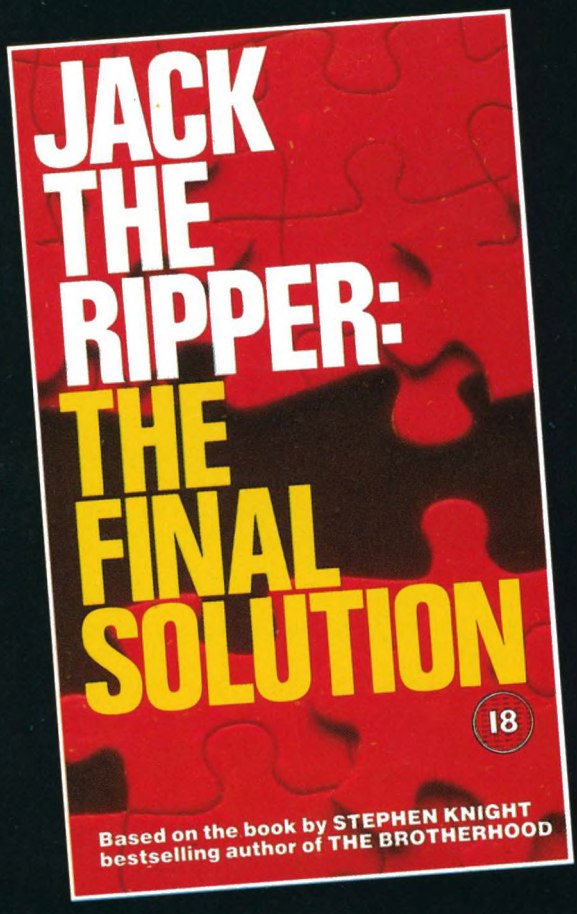

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Before she was even out of the car, Karen knew this was going to be a bad one. It had been a routine enough call: a member of the public had complained about the noise from a neighbouring house, a squat in Milston Lane. Deafening rock music at two in the afternoon; then shouts, and screams, and all sorts of racket. Probably one of "those acid house parties", the caller had suggested helpfully: she'd heard about such things. Besides, everyone knew the young people living there were into drugs.

The local constabulary had indeed been round to number 63 Milston Lane on two previous occasions, in search of drugs. The place was a pit, a squalid hole. But nothing illegal had been found; so until the eviction order went through there was nothing much they could do. They kept on trying nonetheless.

The place looked no different this time round: just another delapidated squat, in a gritty terrace, on a street of windblown litter. Bottom front windows boarded up; the smell of cat's piss and rotting rubbish rising bitter from the basement. Crypto-anarchist graffiti daubed the walls. No different . . . yet she had a strange, uneasy feeling that this time it was. The house was completely silent, and the silence was ominous. She gave the grime-blinded upper windows a long look before slamming her door; Colin slammed his, and they walked up to the front together, the still air crackling with the crosstalk from their slung handsets.

A rap on the door produced no answer; the only attention came from a couple of black kids lounging further down the street. Karen glanced at them, looked away. There had been tension between the locals and the police of late, she knew that. They'd been promised backup she hoped they wouldn't need.

She stood back, surveyed the building's crumbled facade; aware of Colin's furtive sidelong glance, and carefully ignoring it. Didn't need to be much of a detective to tell that he fancied her, and perhaps she should feel flattered. She was certainly pretty, in a rather spoiled and sulky-looking way, thanks to narrowed blue eyes and a natural pout; short fair hair (she hadn't bothered with her hat), and a compactly attractive figure filling out the uniform. And he in turn was a nice enough bloke: quiet, not one of your would-be Sweeney types. She liked him for that. Maybe when they'd got to know each other better . . . Still no response from inside the house. Colin knocked again. There were more blacks on the street now.

Karen lifted the handset to her mouth. "Sierra Oscar from Sierra Oscar One One Three . . . What's the situation rebackup on Milston Lane?"

Busy though the channel was, the Control Room came back promptly. "Sit tight, they're on their way now." "Police. Open up please," Colin called hopefully.

"Man, why don't you leave poor folks be?" an onlooker suggested.

Quite a crowd had gathered by the time the big police transit turned into the street and drove up to number 63. Sergeant Dykstra was sitting up beside the driver: Karen saw him, and almost sighed in relief. Dykstra could cool a volatile situation like this with his very presence: six feet tall, burly and bearded. And black, of course. Black as his uniform, and the leather gloves he always seemed to wear.

The crowd parted reluctantly; Dykstra climbed out, and the van disgorged the rest of its load. Six more officers, young, white and looking aggressive. A couple of bystanders were shoved aside. Karen bit her lip. Dykstra came up. "WPC Keeler: what's the situation?" "Er . . . still trying to effect entry, sergeant . . ." "They've had enough time, break the door down."

Karen blinked; then stood aside, as Colin and two others set to work on the front door. It swung inwards with a splintering of wood. The smell that gushed out made them all grimace. "Shit. Come on, then."

The ground floor was in near total darkness, save for where daylight filtered in through gaps in the window-boards. They went through it room by room, their torches illuminating bare floors and sagging ceilings; scavenged furniture, and peeling wallpaper that hung in rags like damp decaying skin.

They found the first occupant in the cupboard under the stairs: a black youth, maybe eighteen, squeezed into the furthest corner, and hugging himself tight in sheer wide-eyed terror. Heedless of his protestations, they hauled him out; and indeed, as

"Someone had etched two inverted crosses on the wall above the tank, and the number 666, and the legend: Do what you will shall be the whole of the law. She hadn't been to church for years, but that was sick, and it made her feel cold. Imagine being locked in with that, and your pants around your ankles . . ."

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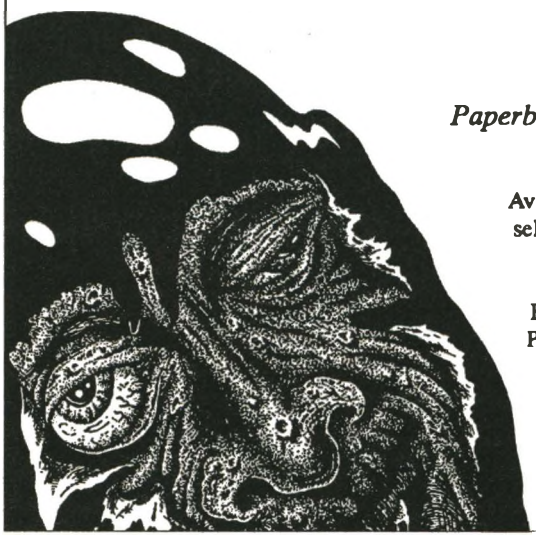

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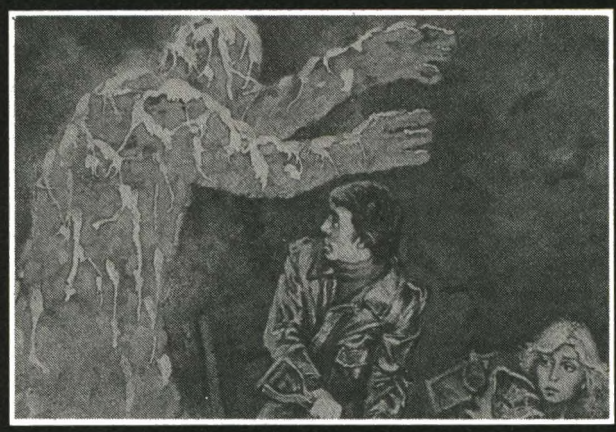

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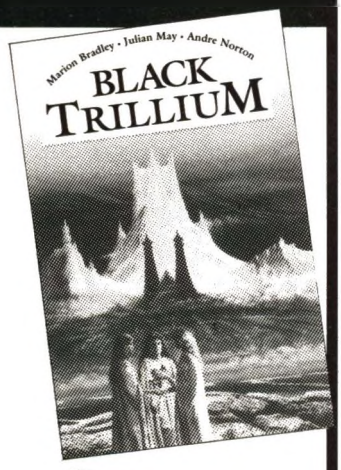

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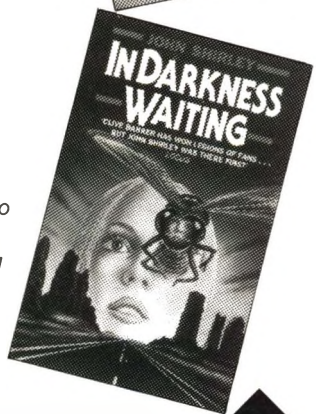

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HEADLINE FEATURE

he recognised their uniforms, his frantic struggles grew less . . . quietening to the odd convulsive twist. He moaned dully, but didn't speak. Two officers led him out.

The next one was in the back kitchen: sitting calmly at table, in a splash of dull sunlight where the windows had been unboarded. He looked slowly round as they came in — a gaunt, emaciated young man with intense blue eyes, and lank hair brushed back and down to his shoulders. His face registered no fear, nor even surprise. On the table before him, on a square of polythene, was a little heap of white powder.

Three of them confronting him there in the room, and the silence was almost awkward. Radios crackled on the stairway; boots creaked overhead. Then Karen stepped forward to dab her finger in the powder; touched it to her tongue, and nodded grimly. "The Real Thing." She pulled a face. "Shit, it's strong — really pure . . . "

Colin had already laid a formal hand on the young man's shoulder. "I'm PC 422 Colin Shepherd, and I am arresting you on suspicion of unlawful possession of a controlled substance, you do not have to say anything . . ." Karen left him to it.

The toilet was on the first landing, and it brought her up short. Someone had etched two inverted crosses on the wall above the tank, and the number 666, and the legend: Do what you will shall be the whole of the law. She hadn't been to church for years, but that was sick, and it made her feel cold. Imagine being locked in with that, and your pants around your ankles . . .

Dykstra's voice at her elbow made her jump. "Incredible, isn't it? I wonder if they knew what they were doing?" Even he seemed slightly subdued. But after a moment he clapped her on the shoulder: "C'mon, Keeler. Nearly done."

They found the girl right up in the attic, cowering in the shadows and spider-webs: as terrified as the first boy had been. It took Karen quite a while to coax her out into the dusty daylight, and her body was still shivering as the WPC put a protective arm around her shoulders. She too looked to be in her late teens or early twenties; just another little girl lost. She might have once been pretty.

One room remained to be searched, on the first floor. The door was locked, and stayed closed even after the lock had been forced: clearly it was wedged by something inside. When the door was finally wrenched off its hinges, they realised what.

Sergeant Dykstra thumbed the button on his handset, speaking down into it without taking his eyes from the huddled, twisted shape on the threshold of the room. "Uh, Sierra Oscar from Sierra Oscar One Two Oh . . . Twenty-eight, we have a Twenty-eight at number 63 Milston Lane . . ." Code G28. A Sudden Death. Karen led the girl quickly past, and hoped she hadn't seen.

As soon as the black youth laid eyes on the long-haired young man, he began to scream — a hoarse, despairing outcry of fear and horror that he carried all the way to the waiting van, twisting and kicking in his escorts' grip. He was unceremoniously bundled inside; Karen thought she saw a covert punch being landed. An angry murmur rose from the watching crowd.

The young man followed, unresisting, climbing into the back of the transit under his own steam. More yelling from within: pleading now; abruptly curtailed.

Dykstra detailed two men to stand guard over the house until the forensic team and the CID arrived; then gestured to Karen. "The girl had better go in your car — save her any further distress. I'll come with you."

Karen shrugged, nodded. Behind her, one of the officers was saying "You see the look on his face? Jesus. Like he died of fright . . . " And the other answered: "Yeah, but what about the nature of the injuries — the way he was bruised? Like he was trying to get under the door. Something in that locked room scared him so much . . . he was trying to get under the door." They nosed their way through the crowd — thinning it out with a couple of irritable whoops on the transit's siren — and put on speed towards Morriston crossroads and the ringway: the van leading, the petrol car following behind. Colin was driving, with Dykstra beside him; Karen in the back with her arm still round the stunned and speechless girl.

As they put some distance between themselves and the house on Milston Lane, the latter seemed slowly to emerge from her daze: began glancing nervously around her . . . assessing her situation. And abruptly she turned haunted eyes on Karen and asked: "Have they gone? The Clinicians? Have they?" Strange word to use, Karen thought: why not Doctors? "How do you mean?" she asked carefully.

"The Clinicians were there," the girl said in a small voice. "Oh God I was so scared. The Sawbones always operates without an anesthetic . . . but the Garsman would put you to sleep for good. And the Leecher, he bleeds his patients white . . . " Her gaze was unfocused now, and Karen risked a quick glance forward: her eyes meeting Dykstra's in the rearview mirror. Let her ramble, the Sergeant's expression said.

They were passing through an area of slum clearance now: waste ground and gutted ruins forming a demilitarised zone between inner city and suburbia. A grim emptiness beneath a cloud-dulled sky. Just under a mile to Morriston, and suddenly

the van ahead turned right, crashed through a stand of dustbins and went lurching off across a patch of stony, open ground. Colin swore, and swerved to follow it — the two vehicles churning up clouds of pale dust until the transit finally juddered to a halt, and the car pulled up a dozen yards behind.

Stillness then, apart from the settling dust. Karen's hand crept unbidden to her mouth: the ominous feeling was back again, and stronger than ever. Beside her, the girl sat very still. And then Colin and Dykstra were out of the car and running forward, and Karen was getting out too, and pulling the girl unresisting after her.

"Yeah, but what about the nature of the injuries — the way he was bruised? Like he was trying to get under the door. Something in that locked room scared him so much . . . he was trying to get under the door."

Dykstra reached the transit first, and yanked the rear door open. And the body of a policeman slithered partway out, to hang unmoving; face a mask of blood, and jacket soaking scarlet. He'd been brained with his own truncheon, and disembowelled by something very sharp . . .

Even Dykstra recoiled from that, lurching back — giving Karen a clear view of the van's interior. And all the rest were dead in there: slumped where they sat. Eyes still open, faces slack, despite the savagery with which they'd been ripped and hacked and stabbed; and indeed, some of the wounds had about them an almost clinical neatness, an anatomical precision that belied the mere seconds in which they'd bee inflicted . . .

The black youth lay sprawled against the driver's mesh partition: his jaw sagging — dislocated by his final soundless scream. He'd been sliced clean open; bits of his anatomy littered the floor. Of the white youth, there was no sign.

Karen felt nausea bubbling up, and struggled to quell it; she thumbed her handset — but only clicks and dead air answered her. Beside her, the girl was moaning "No . . . no . . . no . . . " in a dull monotone. Colin, who'd run to check the driver, spat out the last of his sickness, and stumbled back to the car.

He slid behind the wheel, and they heard him set about trying to raise Control on the radio as they surveyed the carnage. Dykstra was muttering, "How . . . in God's name how . . . ?" And abruptly the girl said: "you put someone in with them? Christ . . . That was the Anatomist. In human form again . . ."

"So where's the guy now?" Dykstra burst out. "Where — " And a sudden gagging sound behind them made them all whirl.

Karen glimpsed a dark shape in the back of the car — where they'd just moments ago been sitting — and it was hauling Colin up and over his seatback. She saw her colleague kicking, clawing, choking; the car itself rocking on its wheels. And abruptly the vehicle was in flames, the fuel tank igniting with a vicious, searing whump.

They reeled back from the heat and the horror — and then the blazing car lurched, and began to move. "Handbrake's burned through!" Dykstra yelled, and dodged aside. So did Karen, pulling the girl along with her. And the four-wheeled fireball swerved, and came on after them. Sheer disbelief rooted Karen to the spot for an almost fatal moment; then she threw herself against her charge, carrying them both out of the vehicle's path. It missed by scant feet, lurching on to plough into the stalled transit and slewing it round. The van exploded then, bursting open in an orange pull-ball that made the daylight dark.

It knocked them down. And as they struggled to their feet, Karen thought she saw figures running through the roiling smoke around them: fleeting shadows in the fog. Their handsets were going haywire, picking up eerie gibberish; hisses and sighs.

"Run for cover!" Dykstra howled, and run they did, sprinting for the nearest buildings. The sergeant had his truncheon out and ready; Karen grasped the girl's wrist tight, fairly dragging her along. Clear of the smoke, they covered the last few yards and fetched up in the hallway of a derelict apartment block that was well on its way to demolition. No sign of pursuit and they paused, gasping and retching, to catch their breath. Dykstra recovered first — and reached out to grasp the girl's collar.

"Who — are — they?"

"The Clinicians," she murmured, "I told you."

"And who the — "

"Probably one of 'those acid house parties', the caller had suggested helpfully: she'd heard about such things. Besides, everyone knew the young people living there were into drugs."

"Who knows?" she answered dully. "Some say demons; others, creatures from another dimension. Clinicians is just one of the names men have given them." She lapsed into silence. Karen and Dykstra just stared at her.

After a moment she continued. "The Pillpusher came first: Dave sort of summoned him up, I don't know how. He promised us the purest stuff: driven snow. And he delivered, too. But there was a price, of course. Our bodies. Our souls. And when we wouldn't pay, he came back with the others. The Anatomist. The Sawbones. The Leecher. The Shrink. Oh my God . . ."

She spoke that in the same dull monotone, and it took them a couple of seconds to realise that she was looking past them now, back towards the door through which they'd come. They swung round — and saw what stared at them.

The head seemed sealed tight inside some latex rubber mask that erased its every feature; the smooth white blankness varied only by the snub of a nose, the sightless

hollows of eyes, and now the gaping impression of a mouth behind that thin elastic skin. And with that long-drawn, soundless howl, it began to open the door . . .

"Run! Get away," Dykstra shouted — standing his ground with truncheon poised. Karen would dearly have loved to; yet still she hesitated. And it was too late anyway, for slow deliberate footsteps were already echoing in the corridors to left and right, and she glimpsed movement in the gloom, and pale blank rubber faces.

No option now but the stairway up to the next level, and they took it two steps at a time: Karen and the girl leading; Dykstra following close behind and covering their rear. Up into a maze of grimy concrete corridors and gutted rooms; the air dank with shadow and smell. Relentless footsteps followed. And abruptly the girl was grabbing Karen's arm, staring fiercely into her eyes. "It's me they're after. Me. Once they've got me, they'll leave you alone. " And she broke away and ran.

"No!" Karen shouted, and Dykstra was about to sprint in pursuit as she vanished round a corner of the corridor. Wan light spilling in from an unblocked window somewhere cast her fleeing shadow on the far wall — and other shadows too: tall, ungainly, ragged. With a sick feeling of helplessness, Karen watched them converging; merging. Then the scream, high-pitched and horrifying: choked to a gurgle; silenced. The shadows faded, as though a cloud had passed across the sun.

After the silence had persisted for several minutes, Karen and Dykstra finally worked up the nerve to walk up to the corner and take a look. Slow and cautious. The sergeant still gripping his truncheon like he'd never let it go.

A brief look told them more than enough. Karen just stood there and thought: I never ever knew her name. She glanced at Dykstra, and Dykstra looked at her. And one thought at least was clear from his face.

Now you know what open heart surgery sounds like without the anesthetic.

So they left the empty building, and reported in. The debriefing lasted hours. And already the evening papers were screaming boys-in-blue murder: an inner city riot of unparalleled savagery. Neither Karen nor Dykstra saw reason to contradict the assumption; neither mentioned Clinicians, or the things of which they were capable. Neither wished to be detained pending psychiatric reports.

When they finally let Karen out, she went straight home, ran a hot and foaming bath , and settled down to soak. A while ago, not long after she'd joined the force, she'd been detailed to witness a Coroner's post-mortem, and had come away from the mortuary reeking of formalin, its sourness in her very pores. She'd soaked and soaked and scrubbed for hours to rid her body of the smell. And the same obsessive urge possessed her now. The need to feel clean again — and wash the memories away.

After a while she felt better; and, as she relaxed, became aware of a vague bitterness on her tongue. It took her a moment to realise what it was. She'd sampled the tiniest trace of the drugs at number 63, and the aftertaste still lingered in her mouth . . .

Driven snow, the girl had said. Absently, Karen hooked the chain between her toes and pulled the plug. She sat up, reaching for a towel.

And a hand grasped her arm, rubber-sheathed fingers digging in tight. Her head snapped round — and a white rubber face was staring down at her, a poised hand holding a slim and wicked syringe. Before she could even gasp, the needle was driven into the tender underneath of her forearm: a piercing sting, then the bone-deep pressure as the contents were injected.

The paralysis that followed was immediate and total. Karen slumped back, feeling the bath's cold enamel against her shoulder, the growing coolness on her skin as the water drained away. Feeling it all . . . and unable to bat an eyelash.

She sensed the Clinician's movement beside her, but caught only the odd glimpse as it strayed into her fixed field of vision She saw enough. Sterile packs of needles being peeled briskly open: the bitter whiff of disinfectant reached her nostrils. Large-bore transfusion needles, fitted with neat plastic valves. She knew then which one they'd sent for her. This was the Leecher.

Working calmly and methodically, the Clinician made a pincushion of its patient, sliding its needles into the deep-running veins in arm and wrist, throat and thigh; a dozen places more. And Karen lay helpless and still, and felt each jab, each sharp steel pressure beneath her skin. Her heart was racing now, but her mind stayed icy clear. Clear enough to realise that the speed of her heartrate would kill her all the quicker; clear enough to remember once more that oh so insignificant tasting of the clean white powder in the kitchen of 63 Milston Lane. The Clinicians' gift. The Clinicians' curse. No matter how tiny the trace on her tongue, she was theirs now.

And then the Leecher set about opening the valves, and the blood began to seep, and squirt, and flow. And just before the depthless darkness claimed her, it seemed she heard a muffled, gloating voice pronounce that most chilling phrase of all.

Now this won't hurt one bit.

"Dykstra reached the transit first, and yanked the rear door open. And the body of a policeman slithered partway out, to hang unmoving; face a mask of blood, and jacket soaking scarlet. He'd been brained with his own truncheon, and disembowelled by something very sharp . . ."

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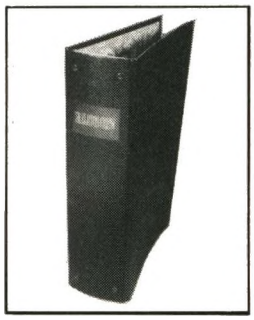

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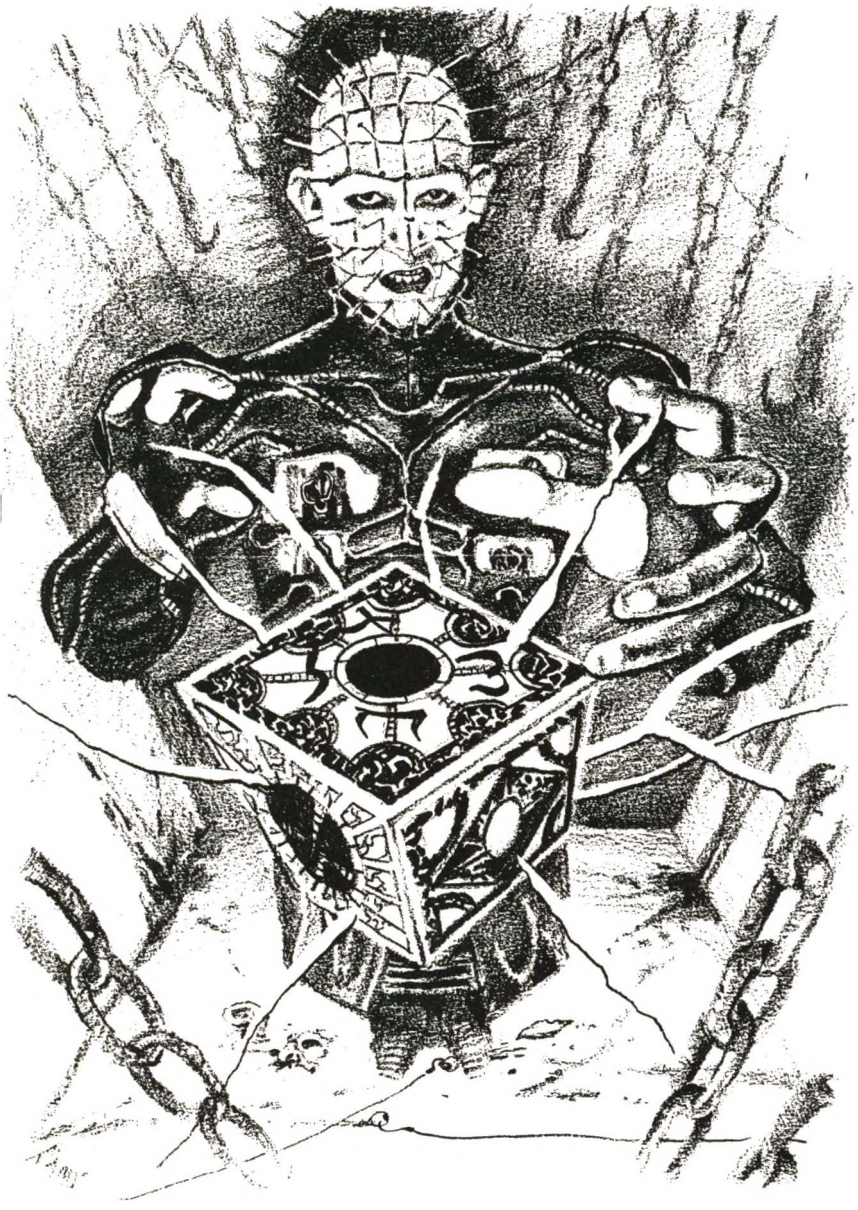
LAST WRITES

You know how in the early reaches of the morning, somewhere between the last drink and the dawn, the mind starts to freewheel. And, how in that slow descent into sleep, the simplest questions take on the greatest significance. Questions like: how come the success of writers in the horror genre doesn't necessarily have a direct relationship to their writing talent?

Now it would be invidious of me to single out too many successful authors who, frankly, couldn't write their way onto a GCSE set book list, but we can quite clearly talk of a couple of authors, both friends of us here. I offer you: Ramsey Campbell and Clive Barker. Both, I think, are wonderfully talented writers; both have unique visions; both care deeply about the genre; both gain the approval and support of the hardcore fans; both win awards. In fact, there's only one difference — Clive shifts books by the truckload, Ramsey doesn't.

Art: DAVID HITCHCOCK



Do you find that strange? I do. After all, Ramsey has won more awards for horror fiction than any other writer, alive or dead. But Clive sells. What's your theory on that?

The one that occured to me at three in the morning and the one I would welcome your comments on is this: Clive gives us monsters and to the buying public 'horror = monsters'. For one thing, they're merchandisable and help to create an instant image — just try setting the image of urban desolation (Ramsey) against Pinhead (Clive) and see which one sells. And although both write profoundly about the human condition (note: I'm not suggesting that Clive merely goes for the money), only one picks up a roller-coaster marketing drive. Of course, the films and the comics help to drive the Barker juggernaut on, but — note this — they are visual mediums that rely on strong images too. That's why the successes of both worlds are monster-based: Dracula, Jason, Aliens and the rest.

In fact, the only real, non-single monster success I can think of was EC Comics — and even there the monster titles outsold science fiction and the others.

Not that there 's anything wrong with monsters, with strong images. Just that the public's focus on them means they miss out on so many great authors whose work is more widespread: Charlie Grant, Karl Wagner, Tom Ligotti, Dennis Etchison, the list goes on and on.

So, stick with your strong images — just remember, there's a equally strong and strange world of horror fiction out there too.

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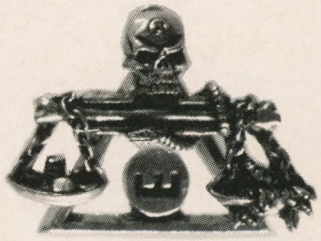

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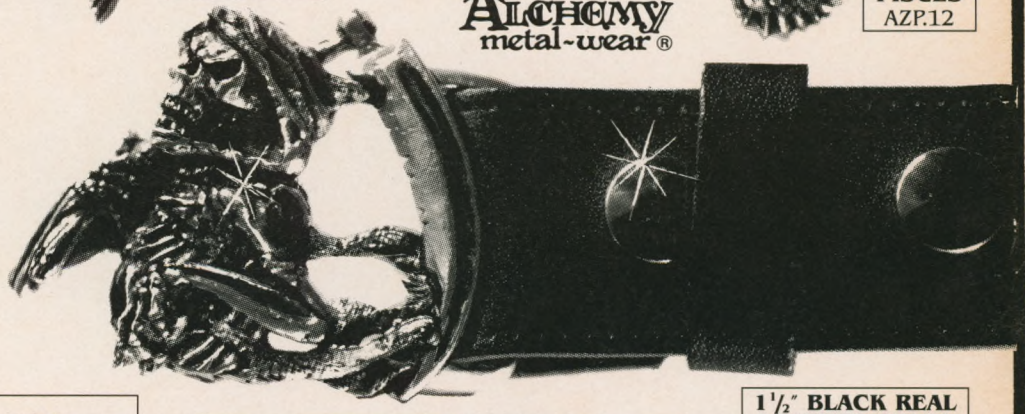

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